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CAROLINE E. JACOBS

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Joan of Juniper Inn

Joan's Jolly Vacation

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JOAN OF JUNIPER INN

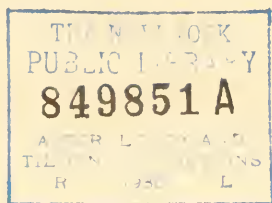
By
CAROLINE E. JACOBS

Author of
"Joan's Jolly Vacation"
"Joan's California Summer," etc.



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To my Mother

CONTENTS

I.	THE OLD SIGN	9
II.	PREPARATIONS	20
III.	SCOTT	38
IV.	THE JUNIPER INN	53
V.	SHOPPING	.	.	.	.	69
VI.	A BOX FROM HOME	.	.	.	.	85
VII.	CHRISTMAS TREES	.	.	.	.	106
VIII.	SUNDAY AFTERNOON	.	.	.	.	130
IX.	SUPPER FOR TWO	.	.	.	.	148
X.	CONFESSION	.	.	.	.	169
XI.	ATTENTIONS	.	.	.	.	186
XII.	ON THE SHORE ROAD	.	.	.	.	207
XIII.	THE DAY AFTER	.	.	.	.	224
XIV.	CO-ED	.	.	.	.	237
XV.	HELEN	.	.	.	.	256
XVI.	MENDING AND MILLINERY	.	.	.	.	271
XVII.	PICNICKING	.	.	.	.	288
XVIII.	THE TREASURE CLOSET	.	.	.	.	314
XIX.	GOOD-BYE	.	.	.	.	336
XX.	A FAMILY COUNCIL	.	.	:	.	355
XXI.	GOOD NEWS	.	.	.	.	377

Joan of Juniper Inn

CHAPTER I

THE OLD SIGN

JOAN swung lazily back and forth in the hammock that hung at one end of the wide back veranda. At the other end, Jack was giving Bob and Margie their lessons.

"Two and two make four," nine-year-old Bob was saying, "six more makes ten, and ——"

"Jack," Joan sat up suddenly, tossing back her long dark braids, "why must two and two always make four?"

"They don't," Bob volunteered; "they made five last time."

"Now you look here, Joan," Jack protested, "this isn't the time for abstract speculations."

"We-all might take a recess," Bob suggested; and Margie, his junior by two years, and inseparable companion, dutifully seconded the motion.

Jack failed to see the matter in that light, so

Bob's droning count began once more ; while Joan, leaning back among the hammock cushions again, stared thoughtfully out into the cool green of the palmetto grove at one side of the house.

There was a little pucker between the girl's brown eyes, and the slender fingers interlaced above her head tightened nervously now and then.

Overhead, the December sun shone brightly, and the soft warm air was sweet with the scent of roses. With a sigh, Joan turned to watch the little group at the other end of the veranda. Jack, her twin, less tall and strong than she for his fifteen years—the crutch beside his chair accounted for that—but like her, with dark hair and eyes, and clear well cut features ; Bob and Margie, brown, sturdy and happy-go-lucky, listening with good-natured tolerance to Jack's explanation, that nine times eight was not seventy.

"I don't mind so much for the children," Joan said to herself ; "they're little yet, and happy and contented enough. It's different with Jack ; he's set his whole heart on going away to school, and I really believe we might've managed it this winter, if mamma hadn't been sick so long, but it's out of the question for the pres-

ent, at any rate. What's worse, mamma needs things that we simply can't get for her, and Theo looks worried to death."

Getting up, Joan went over to a chair beside Jack. Leaning her arms upon the table, littered with books, she seemed to be listening to the short history talk he had just begun to give his small pupils. In reality, she was listening merely to his voice, a singularly magnetic one, that could be grave or gay at its owner's will and telling herself that for generations the Claytons had been known at bar, or pulpit. Jack would be the first break in a long line. Joan brought her small clenched fist down sharply on the table. There should be no break—Jack must have his chance.

His laugh recalled her. "That was a thump! Really, Joan, if you won't go away, my pupils must."

"Send them away," Joan said, "I want to talk with you."

"Secrets?" Margie asked, looking interested.

"Business," her sister answered. "'The Committee on Ways and Means' is going to hold a meeting in order to discuss the important question of how to make two and two equal, not four, nor even five, but six, seven, eight."

"I don't understand, do you?" Margie asked, as she and Bob ran off to play.

"Oh, she just means that we-all're getting poor."

"We-all weren't ever rich, were we?" Margie asked.

"N-no, but I reckon we're going to be lots poorer."

"Do you s'pose we'll have to go away from here?" Margie questioned anxiously, balancing herself on a fence rail beside Bob. "Why we-all never've lived anywheres else. Old Nannie says grandfather came here to live after the war when he hadn't any other house left."

"It used to be a tavern before that," Bob said.

"I know; I'd liked to've lived here then, wouldn't you, Bob; with people coming and going, and those long stables full of horses?"

Bob gave a sudden shrill whistle. "I say, Margie!" he exclaimed, and jumping down, he scampered off, followed by Margie, to a lumber shed above the disused stables.

The meeting of "The Committee on Ways and Means" had been obliged to adjourn almost at once, owing to Joan's being summoned up-stairs by her sister Theo. Half an hour later she was

called down again by Nannie, the old black cook.

"Honey," Nannie said, "hyah be two young fellers askin' fo' lunch, askin' up right peart, too."

"Lunch!" Joan repeated. "Well, Nannie, I reckon they'll have to have it. Who are they?"

"I dunno, honey; none of de folkses f'om roun' hyah," Nannie answered.

Joan arranged a tray for her to carry out, piling crisp brown cookies on a blue and white plate, and filling a pitcher with cool fresh milk.

There were not many cookies left at the bottom of the deep stone crock, and there could not be another baking before the end of the week, but for a Clayton to have refused a request for hospitality would have been an impossibility.

Still, when less than an hour later, Nannie came again on a similar errand, Joan hesitated.

"Four!" she exclaimed. "What possesses people! It'll have to be bread and butter and marmalade this time."

As she went back to her mending, Joan laughed a little ruefully. "Next time, I suppose there'll be eight," she said.

"Honey," Nannie stood in the doorway, hold-

ing out a one-dollar bill, "see what I'se dun foun' on de tray. Dey-all 'quired what was ter pay, so did dose oders. I tole dem an' I tole dese dat we-all's Claytons, an' don't tak' money fo' a little food. Dem oders mus' 'long ter de qual'ty 'case dey onderstood, an' didn't go leavin' der ol' money on de tray."

"Give it to me," Joan sprang up, her cheeks flaming. Taking the bill, she ran through the broad centre hall to the front porch.

She was just in time to catch a glimpse of the cyclers as they turned a bend in the road.

Sitting down on the steps, Joan studied the money with troubled eyes. She longed to toss it to old Nannie and yet —

Then as a light breeze came sweeping up the road, sending little whirling eddies of white dust before it, an odd creaking sound overhead made Joan look up.

There in its old place hung the sign of the once famous tavern, battered, weather-stained, from long years of exposure, with its green Juniper Tree almost invisible.

Joan ran down the steps. Standing there bare-headed in the sunny road, she stared up at the swinging sign. For the moment, her

thoughts went back to the stories of those far off days before the war when the quiet road of to-day had been a busy traveled highway ; and this long rambling house, with its dormer-windowed, projecting upper story, the centre of much life and gaiety. Many a time, her grandfather, riding home from County Court, had drawn rein before the door for a chat with his tenant, the tavern-keeper, and a glass of something cool. And here, when the war was over, and the old family mansion on Green Street, Simon's Island, left in ruins, he had brought his family. The former tenant had gone away, the sign was down, and bit by bit the one-time tavern had grown into a quiet family home.

The creaking of the sign again recalled Joan's thoughts. How had it come there ? It must come down at once. Now she understood those requests for lunches.

Suddenly, a daring thought entered the girl's head. The old sign swaying above her, its tarnished gilt catching and reflecting back the sunlight, seemed offering an answer to her problem of the morning.

Suppose they left it hanging there, holding

themselves in readiness to meet, as far as possible, any demands upon their hospitality.

Going back to the door-step, Joan tried to view the question soberly and impartially. She was too young and inexperienced to realize in the least the difficulties of such an undertaking. It seemed to her that if they really tried to do their best, they must succeed. Nannie was a good cook; they had their own poultry, milk and butter on the place. Surely there need not be very much outlay, if only Theo and Jack would agree to the plan.

"Oh, Joan!" some one called, and a girl of seventeen came to the open front door. "Oh, Joan, what's all this about strangers asking for lunch and paying for it?"

Joan laughed. "Some people achieve greatness; others have it thrust upon them. Who do you suppose hung that old sign?"

Theo's glance followed Joan's gesture; then the color rushed to her face, and her eyes, brown like all the Claytons', flashed indignantly.

"I understand," she said. "So they thought this was a tavern. Bob is probably at the bottom of this. I'll go find him. That sign must come down at once."

"Theo," Joan spoke coaxingly, "let's leave it up a while."

Theo turned in astonishment. "Leave it up!" she exclaimed.

"Theo dear, I've been thinking it over; we've simply got to earn money in some way."

"But to keep a tavern!" Theo lifted her pretty head proudly.

"It won't be that, really. Not many people pass this way."

Theo shook her head. "It's a perfectly preposterous idea. I know Jack will think so, too."

"We'll go ask him right now," Joan said.

They found Jack out in the palmetto grove, busy over his Latin grammar.

"Will your Honor be pleased to listen to the argument for, or against, the proposition first?" Joan asked, settling herself on the grass beside him, while Theo, leaning against a palmetto tree, looked down at them both with flushed face.

"Jack," she said, "I hope you'll use your influence to ——"

"No trying to bias the Court beforehand," Joan protested.

"What *are* you two talking about?" Jack exclaimed.

"A tavern, or not a tavern," Joan said, tossing the dollar bill to her twin. "Behold the first earnings of the new Juniper Inn."

Jack looked more puzzled than ever, whereupon Joan, taking pity upon him, gave him a brief account of the strange happenings of the morning, ending with a short earnest plea in behalf of her side of the case.

As she finished, Jack turned to Theo. "The Court will now listen to the learned counsel for the opposite side," he said.

Theo twisted a blade of grass between her fingers. "I don't like the idea at all," she began, "it's—well, horrid."

"So many things are in this world," Joan observed, with a little sigh.

"Then," Theo went on, "it would not do at all to trouble mamma about it. Dr. Burley said this morning that she was not to be worried about anything. And surely we-all could not undertake it without her permission?"

"Would it be very wrong, under the circumstances?" Joan looked from Theo to Jack. "We all know how impossible it is to ask her about it. Her room is so far off that she need not be disturbed by the coming and going. I would do

everything I could, so as not to keep you from her, Theo."

There was a moment's silence. Theo was looking toward the long, low house beyond. In the open windows of the room, at the far end of the east wing, the white muslin curtains were swaying lightly. Theo drew a deep breath and turned suddenly to Joan.

"Yes," Joan said, answering the question in her sister's eyes, "it would mean being able to do so much for her."

Theo stooped for another blade of grass. "The argument against the proposition is withdrawn," she said.

Jack scrambled to his feet. Leaning on his crutch, he looked from one sister to the other. "In that case," he said slowly, "the decision of the Court is that for the present, the old sign shall be allowed to remain in its place, only"—the mock dignity vanished from his voice, "I want you both to understand that I don't like it one bit. And I reckon if Bob doesn't want his ears cuffed, he'd best keep out of my way for a while."

CHAPTER II

PREPARATIONS

"WHAT I'd like to know," said Joan, looking across the dinner table at her younger brother, "is how you ever came to think anything about that old sign, Bob?"

"And what I'd like to know," Theo added, from her mother's place at the head of the table, "is how you ever managed to get it up there?"

"And what I'd like to know," Jack supplemented, from the foot of the table, "is how you ever *dared* do it at all?"

Beneath this threefold volley, Bob, though not an especially retiring youngster, was rather taken aback.—"Well," he began, "Margie——"

Theo made a little gesture of impatience. "Behold the man in miniature! Laying the responsibility for his own misdoings upon the woman!"

"Also 'in miniature,'" Jack observed with a smile at Margie.

"But," Bob protested, red-faced and indignant, "Margie did say she'd have liked living here

when it was a tavern; and there were lots of people coming and going, and horses, and everything. And that was what made me think of the sign. Tony'n' me carried it 'round, and the ladder, too. It wasn't hard hanging the sign—the old hook was there all right. I could've done it myself, only Tony wouldn't let me go up on the ladder—and maybe I wasn't quite tall enough. I thought we-all could make lots of money, keeping a tavern. Margie and me'll help."

"I would like to suggest," Theo said, "that, should there be any penalty attached to such a high-handed proceeding, as this of the Hon. Robert's, it might very well be a lesson in grammar."

"Poor Tony," Margie said sympathetically, "he doesn't dare come near the house, 'cause Nannie says that if she catches him, she 'lows she'll guv it to him and Tony, he says he can't 'member when he's be'n so hungry, fer shore."

"Poor Tony," laughed Joan, "I'll see that he gets his dinner all right. Theo, we-all will have to take the 'long room.'"

"As a dining-room for Tony?" Jack asked.

"Take the 'long room'?" Theo repeated.

"It used to be the tavern dining-room, you

know," Joan explained ; "and we're not using it very much just now. Don't you think three or four tables will be enough ?"

"I certainly do."

Margie clapped her hands. "Then we-all are going to really keep a truly tavern ? And can't Bob and I help wait on the people—and do you-all think it will take me very long to learn to carry a tray on my head ?"

When the shout that followed this query had died away, Theo turned a pair of very troubled eyes to Joan. "Oh, but I am afraid we-all are doing wrong ; I am sure mamma would not like it at all, especially for the children."

Jack pushed back his chair. "I understand," he said gravely, "that the Royal children were rarely seen by the Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court."

"Of course," Joan said, "Bob and Margie must be kept in the background."

"And not have any of the fun !" Margie's wail rose protestingly.

"Fun !" Theo exclaimed. "Oh, you blessed innocent !"

"I'm not," Margie insisted vaguely, rubbing her eyes.

"Oh, you and Bob'll have plenty to do," Joan assured her.

Margie sniffed unbelievably. "Plenty of the 'fun' things?" she demanded.

"You wait and see," Joan said.

"And you know, Snipwinkle," Jack added, "that if it weren't for the scene shifters, and the stage carpenters, and all the work-behind-the-scenes people, the play could not go on at all."

"Are we-all going to run a carpenter shop, too?" Bob asked eagerly, and wondered why the older ones laughed.

"What are you-all going to do this afternoon?" Theo asked, at the table.

"Rescue Tony from limbo, first of all," Joan said; "then work in the 'long room.' You come too, Jack."

The "long room" was at the right of the front door. As Bobsaid, it was "long the wrong way," taking in half the width of the main house; three windows opened out on the front porch, while two at the side looked out into the palmetto grove. Opposite the middle front window, was the old-fashioned fireplace, wide and deep, with crane still hanging. The room was wainscoted half way up, in oak, dark with age; the upper walls

and ceiling painted in dull buff. In one corner stood an old oak dresser, built into the room ; in another, a corner-cupboard, the door of which was set with small diamond-shaped panes. High up at one side of the chimney was another cupboard, deep and dark ; the delight of Bob and Margie, who were quite positive that some day, on opening its paneled door, they must discover a treasure of some sort.

There were muslin curtains at the windows, low, comfortable chairs all about, tables littered with books and magazines. It was the room where, when their mother was well, they all gathered of an evening. Lately, it had been deserted, and Joan gave a sudden sigh of homesickness now, as she stood in the doorway, studying the room and its capabilities.

As she had said, it had formerly been the tavern dining-room ; a door at the further end opened into a covered passageway, connecting it with the outside kitchen all together. It was a room admirably suited to their purpose.

Joan turned. "Oh, Tony !" she called ; and Tony appeared, grinning widely.

Tony thoroughly approved of this new venture. There would be gentlemen stopping, gentlemen

with stray dimes, even quarters, which a boy of fourteen, quick to brush a coat, or hold a horse, or pump a tire, might readily earn.

When Theo came down-stairs just before tea time, she found Joan, hot, dusty and tired, giving a few finishing touches to the "long room," while Jack, equally hot, dusty and tired, looked on from one of the cushioned window seats.

Theo sat down beside Jack. "Well, you-all have done wonders," she said.

Joan pushed the hair back from her forehead. "Doesn't it look nice and really businesslike? I'd like to take dinner here myself some day at that little table looking out into the grove."

There were four tables in all, each large enough to accommodate four persons; they and the high-backed oak chairs had been part of the old tavern furnishings; so had the broad settle, at one side of the hearth, the pewter tankards on the mantel, the blue and white dishes on the dresser and behind the glass door of the corner-cupboard, and the old-fashioned prints on the walls, representing hunting scenes.

"Where did you find all these things?" Theo asked wonderingly.

"Oh, Tony and I've been rummaging out in

the old lumber room and I got the dishes and tankards from the dish pantry."

"The room is—is delightful. If only no one comes, I shan't mind keeping a tavern at all," Theo laughed, looking about her. "Joan, you're a genius."

"I wonder," Joan said, curling herself up in one corner of the settle, "whether perhaps these things aren't glad to get back to their old places after all these years in that dark storeroom?"

Jack rubbed his arms; he had had the task of polishing the tankards. "If they are, I'm afraid I can't say the pleasure is mutual, so far as I am concerned."

"Poor boy!" his twin laughed; "Theo, I suppose it wouldn't do to put a big blue denim cushion at each end of this settle? It's absolutely crying out for them."

Theo looked doubtful. "I don't suppose they would be very taverny. However, I don't imagine it's going to be anything but a play tavern and a short lived one at that, let us hope."

"You don't hope anything of the sort, I'm sure, and I know Jack and I don't," Joan asserted.

"Speak for yourself, my Lady Joan," Jack suggested, with another rub at his aching arms.

"And can we leave the curtains up?" Joan asked, ignoring the last remark. "They look so nice and cool."

"Y-es," Theo said, "you've taken away the rugs."

"Oh, of course, Tony must wipe the floor every morning."

"Tony's forgettory is in excellent working order," Jack observed.

"How many calls this afternoon?" Theo asked.

Jack spread out his hands. "I assure you, I am unable to count them."

"There haven't been any," Joan admitted; "but, anyhow, we weren't ready for customers. Is that the proper term?"

"Guests," Jack corrected.

"No," Theo protested, "don't call them that. 'They're not going to be our *guests*. I should call them the nuisances.'"

"How about not calling them anything, until they get here," Jack proposed.

"A nice encouraging pair you are!" Joan exclaimed. "Don't you worry, we're going to have plenty of business. They can come as fast as they like now, and we've made a dollar to-day at any rate."

Jack rubbed his arms again. "That'll only buy two bottles of liniment, and I feel as though *six* would be hardly enough."

Joan nodded reassuringly. "Oh, your arms won't ache nearly so much next time."

"Next time!" Jack gasped.

"You don't imagine those tankards are going to keep bright forever?" Joan asked.

"Then I herewith resign my position as Tankard Polisher to the Juniper Inn," Jack declared promptly.

"Would the office of clerk suit you any better?" his twin asked. "You shall have a table and chair all to yourself, out there in the hall by the front door."

Jack showed instant signs of rebellion. "Sit there by my lonely all day! It'd be about as pleasant as solitary confinement!"

"What, with all the people coming and going?" Joan asked.

"I beg your pardon. I quite forgot there were to be innumerable people coming and going."

Joan's eyes flashed. "You wait and see—you and Theo."

"Couldn't we wait together?" Jack asked

meekly ; “ or must she stand or sit and wait also in solitary confinement ? ”

“ Of course,” Joan went on, unheeding this request, “ you would not have to be there all day ; but some one must be on hand to answer questions, and take in the money, and attend to things of that sort.”

“ How about the children’s lessons ? ” Theo interposed.

“ Couldn’t their holidays begin a little earlier this year ? ” Joan asked. “ It is only three weeks till Christmas. By and by, when things get into running order, we can work them in,” she said as she leaned forward with a little eager movement. “ Isn’t it lovely we can have our Christmas now with mamma getting better and some money coming in.”

“ What is there we-all will not be able to do and have now, Miss Hopeful ? ” Theo asked laughingly.

About eleven o’clock the next morning, Joan came running eagerly down the garden path to where Jack was busy among his roses.

“ Four to dinner, an it please you,” she cried, sweeping him a low courtesy ; “ and the clerk’s chair and table all in place. But the clerk !

Where, oh, where is he?" she finished, to the tune of "Where, Oh, Where is My Little Dog Gone?"

"He's where he likes to be and he's going where he won't like to be—not even a little bit." And Jack turned reluctantly toward the house. He was not fond of meeting strangers.

At the steps Theo met them. "Four such dreadful people," she told Jack; "there they stand on our front porch, calling this 'a dear, quaint place,' and saying they must be sure to 'snap it.' I almost wish Chevalier was here to snap at them. Why actually, one of them vows she means to send for her things and stop here for the rest of the winter!"

Theo's tone and Jack's expression sent Joan off into a gale of laughter.

"Don't!" Theo exclaimed, "it's not one bit funny."

"But you and Jack are."

"What are you going to give them for dinner?" Jack asked.

"Fried chicken, baked sweet potatoes, mashed Irish potatoes, rice, biscuits, corn pone, sweet potato pie, and coffee and cream," Joan repeated.

"How can you?" Theo said, "they'll be sure

to come again. Bread and water is all I'd give them."

"Couldn't they wait until we-all've had our dinner?" Jack asked.

"It's our pie they are going to have. Nannie made it for us as a special treat," laughed Joan, though Jack declared it scarcely a laughing matter.

"I must go show Tony about the table," Joan said. "Dear me! Do you suppose they'll offer to fee the waitress, Theo? I don't believe I could stand that."

"Joan, you're not going to wait on them!" Theo cried.

"Who else is there?"

"Tony, of course."

"But he doesn't know how."

"Then he must learn, and the sooner the better," Theo said decidedly; and Jack added, that certainly it must be Tony.

"Well, Theo," Joan said slowly, "I wonder if"—then she darted suddenly away. In a few moments she was back, her arms full of something white. "There," she said, "I thought there must be some in that old chest. I was sure I'd remembered seeing them somewhere.

They're rather yellow and crumpled from lying by, but they can be laundered, and we must manage somehow for to-day. I'm sorry, for I'd have liked to start right. The Juniper Inn intends to do things up brown."

Jack stooped and shook out one after another of the garments on the porch floor—relics of departed waiters. "Tony would need to be twins to fit any of these things," he declared.

"I'll have him try on a jacket and apron right now," Joan said. "Those people don't want dinner before twelve, and it won't take long to set the table."

A few moments later, Tony appeared for the dress rehearsal. At the sight of him, Theo sank suddenly into the nearest chair and Jack retreated indoors where Joan found him leaning against the wall, limp with laughter.

"The only thing about the scamp that is large enough to suit the suit is his smile," Jack gasped. "When he isn't tripping all over the apron, it'll only be because he's standing still to roll back the sleeves of his jacket. We shall have to hire a waiter to wait on the waiter."

"Don't, you make me dizzy," Joan implored, choking with laughter herself. "And those

people'll hear you. You certainly are the worst clerk. I'd discharge you to-morrow, if it wasn't for your family."

"And I assure you," Jack retorted, "I'd throw up my position but for the same reason. Now I'll go clerk it, only keep Tony out of my sight until he sheds those regimentals. He looks like the ghost of a whole score of waiters."

At a business council, held the evening before, it had been decided to charge thirty-five cents for dinner, and twenty cents for lunches.

So when the fussy, kindly, little gentleman of the party came to pay his bill, he was told the amount was \$1.40.

"A very moderate charge for a most excellent meal," he assured Jack. "Your cook can certainly fry chicken—but who's running this establishment? Surely, not you and that girl with the long braids who took our order? Why you are mere children."

"My sisters and I are trying to run it," Jack answered, with a smile. "It's a new idea of ours. My mother is sick."

"Well, I certainly wish you all the best of luck," the little man said. Like most people, he felt attracted toward Jack. Then he proceeded

to marshal his women folks, who were hovering delightedly before the corner-cupboard in the "long room," actively engaged in breaking the tenth commandment, out to the front steps, where Tony waited, bicycle pump in hand, while leaning against the porch stood four bicycles, their tires in a state of firmness beautiful to behold.

Tony's grin, ever a wide one, threatened to engulf the landscape, as he stood on the steps watching the party ride away. "Reckon this heah purson'll hev to set up a bank 'count soon," he chuckled, as he went indoors.

"And they didn't 'snap the house,'" Joan said, coming to perch on one end of the clerk's table.

"Forgot it probably," Jack said. "They came mighty near committing grand larceny, at least the women did. I wish I knew why a woman has to go into hysterics over an old blue and white platter?"

"Perhaps that is one of the things you'll learn at college," his sister suggested. "I came to tell you the family can now have their dinner. Have you seen the children?"

"Not since breakfast. Aren't they somewhere about the place?"

But dinner was nearly over before they appeared hungry, tired, and dirty.

"Where have you-all been?" Theo demanded.

"Oh, just to town," Bob answered calmly.

"To town alone?" Theo exclaimed.

"We—we took Chevalier," Margie hurried to say.

Chevalier, a handsome, full grown Irish setter, sauntered in at that moment, a most apologetic droop to his wavy tail, a most ingratiating expression in his big red-brown eyes. None knew better than Chevalier that the expedition of the morning had been a contraband affair.

"And who gave you permission?" Theo asked, very severely for Theo.

"We—we-all didn't ask anybody. We—we were in a hurry," Bob explained, "we-all had important bus'ness; we've planned such a surprise for you, haven't we, Margie?"

"You bet," Margie responded, beaming at them all over her glass of milk.

"Ten lines, next time we have lessons, for that speech, Mistress Margie," Jack said severely.

Margie failed to look properly impressed. "Don't believe I can remember so long," she said.

"I reckon," Theo said, "you both deserve a good scolding. You must never go off so by yourselves again. Mamma has been asking for you this morning. You are to go up for a few moments after dinner. Mind, not a word about going to town, or of this tavern business."

"We won't say anything," they promised.

And when later they tiptoed into their mother's room, they were good, only confiding in eager whispers how they had been for a long walk that morning, and that they had a lot of work to do before supper and if mamma could only see the "long room," it looked so funny now.

This last was from Bob, and called forth a warning nudge from Margie.

"I think maybe we'd better be going now," Bob said. "Theo told us not to stay too long."

Mrs. Clayton patted both little brown faces. "I hope you are good children, and that you always mind Theo."

"Yes'm," Bob answered. "Leastways when we don't forget. 'Tisn't any trouble minding *Theo*."

Bob's unspoken inference regarding Jack and Joan made his mother smile, as she kissed him and Margie, and sent them away.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, Joan ran up for a short visit to the sick-room.

"But where have you been all day, dear?" her mother asked.

Joan knelt down beside the bed, laying her face against her mother's thin hand. "Here, there, and everywhere about the house."

"Not everywhere, since not here."

"Indeed, yes, mamma, in thought. You are better to-day, aren't you?"

"Yes, dear, I shall pick up now right along. Joan, what has happened to the 'long room'? Bob says it looks so funny."

"We—we-all've been making—changing the furniture about some," Joan said hastily; "if you should decide that you like it better the old way when you come down-stairs, we can soon rearrange it."

"Young people are different nowadays," Mrs. Clayton said. "When I was a girl, we could never have thought of altering the arrangement of a room at The Oaks."

CHAPTER III

SCOTT

"UPON my word!" Dr. Burley drew rein before the door of the Juniper Inn, and stared up at the swinging sign in astonishment.

On the steps sat a young fellow in wheeling costume; at a small table at the further end two girls were chatting over their coffee and cakes; from the "long room" came the clatter of dishes. "Upon my word," the doctor repeated, "am I dreaming? Is the year of Grace nineteen hundred, or have we slipped back half a century?"

Then catching sight of Jack at his post just inside the open door, Dr. Burley got down from his gig and went in to interview that young gentleman. "Well," he said with a mock sigh of relief, "you do not exactly resemble a phantom of the past, so I presume this is merely a little piece of twentieth century mischief. Scrapes nowadays are as modern as the scrapers."

"But this isn't a scrape," Jack protested; "it's a real bona fide business undertaking, originated by Joan."

"I'll warrant that young lady had more or less to do with it," Dr. Burley answered. "Where is she?"

Hearing the doctor's voice, Joan came out from the "long room." "Good evening, doctor," she said, "shall I take your order?"

The doctor eyed her grimly. "You'll be taking my *orders* presently, miss," he said severely.

"It's pretty warm to-day. Nannie's lemonade is ——"

"I know all about Nannie's lemonade," Dr. Burley interposed. "What I don't know, and mean to learn, is how you young ones come to be running a revised version of the old Juniper Inn. I'm going up to see your mother now. When I come down, there's going to be an investigation."

"You won't say anything to mamma about this?" Joan exclaimed.

"Assuredly not, in her condition," and the doctor strode away.

"Suppose," said Jack as he looked up at his twin, "Dr. Burley says we must give this experiment up?"

"Oh, he won't, when he understands. We can't give up now?" Joan said slowly.

"But I'm afraid. You know he's our guardian."

"And he's an old dear. I'm not afraid of his being horrid," Joan asserted.

Still it was with fast beating heart that half an hour later she followed the doctor out to the palmetto grove. Jack could not leave his post, this first day proving a busy one, and Theo was up-stairs with her mother, so Joan had to plead the cause of the new undertaking unaided.

The doctor listened in silence; his keen eyes under their bushy brows were non-committal.

"And to-day we've done beautifully," Joan said in conclusion. She looked up, her dark eyes full of pleading. "It isn't a bad idea, is it? You'll let us go on for a while at least, won't you, doctor?"

"Humph," Dr. Burley said. "In my opinion, it's about as madcap a scheme as heart could desire. And if I agree not to end it all right now ——"

"Yes," Joan cried eagerly. "Oh, I told Jack I knew you wouldn't make us give it up, not yet, at least."

"Humph," the doctor said again; "as I said, if I give my consent it is only under these conditions ——"

"Yes," Joan repeated confidently.

"You are to say nothing about it to your mother until I give you permission."

"No, indeed," Joan assured him.

"You are not to run into debt."

"I promise," Joan said earnestly.

"And you are to keep me informed as to how things progress. Also, you are to remember that I give my consent most unwillingly."

"Thank you so much," Joan said; "and you think mamma better to-day, don't you, doctor?"

"Better? Yes, but still too far from well to be troubled or excited by any harum-scarum scheme like this."

"Please, you don't think it only that, do you, doctor?" Joan asked, as they turned back to the house.

The doctor pulled one of her braids. "Why, what else could it be?"

But Joan felt comforted and encouraged. "We'll show you," she said. "You will stop now and have some luncheon, won't you?"

"Some other time, I'm late to-day," Dr. Burley answered.

"Well?" Jack asked, when Joan came back to the table by the hall door.

"It is 'well'?" Joan answered, and she told him the doctor's conditions.

A little later, going through to the back veranda, Joan met two very important looking youngsters just coming up the steps from the yard, their arms filled with stiff oblong pieces of pasteboard, their hands and faces, also their clothes, liberally adorned with splashes of vivid red paint.

"What in the world ——" Joan began.

"Shut your eyes," Bob commanded peremptorily.

"It's the s'prise," Margie explained graciously.

"It's a surprise, at any rate," Joan said.

"Shut your eyes!" Bob repeated.

And Joan obeyed, wondering, as she did so, whether the day's profits were all to go for turpentine.

"Now!" Bob cried excitedly.

And Joan, obediently reopening her eyes, found herself surrounded by those oblong pieces of pasteboard, whereon with care, more paint, and the most utter indifference to the accepted rules of spelling, had been inscribed various legends, such as:

"Oisters in evry stile!"

"Try our pie!"

"Fine lemonaid!"

"Corn pone!"

"Sweete pertater pie!"

"Our fryed pertaters cant be beet!"

"Nannys fryed chicken beets them all!"

There were others, but Joan's courage failed her. She shut her eyes again, without being told.

"Isn't it a s'prise?" Margie questioned, and Joan assured her that it was.

"I'll go call Jack," Margie said and Joan sank into a chair to await the coming of her twin.

"Well I'll be jiggered!" was Jack's heartfelt exclamation.

"But," Bob turned to Joan, "why don't you say something? Maybe you-all don't think we've worked hard over these signs."

"I don't d-oubt i-t;" Joan appeared to find speech difficult.

"My boy," Jack's tone was paternal, "there are emotions too deep for words."

"They do look real nice, don't they?" Bob said. "Ours is going to be just like a real rest'rant, ain't it? We went to lots this morn-ing, and they all had things up like these—some

of them had frames, and were kind of shiny. Maybe we can get those kind by'n'by. Anyhow we put a whole can of paint on these; but it paid, didn't it? So we-all don't mind our trouble."

"Red paint is cheerful," Joan said helplessly, her eyes seeking Jack's.

Jack's face had sobered. "Robert Clayton," he demanded indignantly, "do you mean to tell me you took your sister Margaret into those places?"

"He wouldn't let me go into one of them," Margie interposed. "He made me wait outside with Chevalier, but I made him tell me every time 'xactly what he'd seen and I did lots more of the 'membering than he did."

"No, you didn't!" Bob declared, and turning to his older brother said, "Of course I didn't allow Margie to go inside—you might know that."

"Well, you both did very wrong," Jack said severely, "though Bob is the most to blame, and it must not happen again. As for the signs——"

"They aren't—well, exactly suited to a tavern," Joan hurried to explain.

The children looked up in dismay. "Why,"

Bob said, "they'd look fine hanging up on the walls in the 'long room' and they took such a long time to make," he added sadly.

"I'm sorry, dear," Joan said, "but you see we're not going to keep that kind of a tavern. It was very kind of you and Margie to try to help us out, only, as Jack says, you shouldn't have gone off so by yourselves and on such an errand."

"Can we go up and show them to mamma?" Margie asked. "I think they're lovely, and I know she will think so too," she ended for the comforting of her co-worker.

Joan made a hasty swoop down upon the unfortunate signs. "Some day, when she is stronger," she said. "I'll put them away now, so they won't get soiled. You and Bob go and make yourselves presentable."

Bob hesitated. "I—I reckon there's something I'd better tell you-all. I"—he pulled a crumpled piece of paper from his jacket pocket. "I stuck one of these up, down at the station."

Jack took the paper, smoothing it out so that he and his twin might read the notice printed on it in uneven childish lettering :

*"The Juniper Inn
Once More Opens Its Doors to the Quality
Reasonable Rates
First Class Service
Situashun Unexselled Come One Come All"*

"Tony, he helped us write them," Bob explained cheerfully. "He abs'lutely insisted on that about the qualty. He said we-all didn't want a lot of no-account people coming round here."

"And you put one of these papers up in the station!" Joan gasped.

Bob nodded proudly.

"Anywhere else?" Jack asked.

"Not yet. We-all didn't have time to write any more—this was too blotty, so we used it for a copy. Margie and I said we'd help. . It's abs'lutely nec-ess'ry in these days to ad'ertise"—Bob's hands had gone to the pockets of his knickerbockers, his hat was on the back of his head, his stout little legs were planted well apart—"heard a man say so the other day, down to the store."

"I think," Joan said slowly, "that the Hon. Robert is going to be a big man one of these days."

"He's going to be an exceedingly uncomfor-

table small boy, if he doesn't quit parading all over the country without permission," Jack said. "Joan, can you manage a while without me? I've an errand down to the station."

Joan nodded comprehendingly.

"You ain't going after our 'vertisement?" Margie cried.

"I am," and Jack started for the stable.

Bob watched him a moment, then he dropped into a little disconsolate heap on the upper step, his under lip quivering in spite of all his efforts.

"Bob honey," Joan said, sitting down beside him, "I don't believe you and Margie understand. You see, as I said, our tavern isn't to be like those other places. We couldn't keep that kind, even if we wanted to and we wouldn't want a crowd of people about, even if they were 'quality.' All the same, it's lovely of you and Margie to try so hard to help, only, dear, you'd better take some one older into your confidence next time; and really, you must not go off so. You know mamma would not like it."

Molly, the old mare, was not a rapid traveler and it was past tea time before Jack returned.

Joan met him at the door. "Did you get it?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, I did not. I tell you, I'm hungry—and disgusted."

"You poor boy. Well, your supper's ready. Jack, perhaps it fell on the floor and has been swept up."

"It is certainly to be hoped so," Jack said wearily. "Joan, it does seem sometimes as if the Hon. Robert were possessed. Think of that announcement!"

"If you have no objection, I would prefer *not* to think of it," Joan laughed. "Poor Bob, he meant well; his feelings were very much hurt by our reception of his efforts to help."

Jack's answer was not especially complimentary to his younger brother, but then he was tired and hungry both.

The next morning, Joan, standing at one of the windows in the "long room," saw two wheelmen ride up and, after glancing up curiously at the swinging sign, dismount. One was a grave, scholarly-looking man; the other, a lad of about Jack's age.

"Dinner for two," Jack came to announce a moment later. "I'd begun to think we were to have no customers this morning."

Quarter of an hour after, Joan was out in the

garden gathering some violets for her mother's room. As she bent down over the deep purple blossoms, she forgot for the moment the cares and worries of the past few days. The soft air, with its touch of ocean freshness, the stillness all about her, the violets nestling among their green leaves, all soothed and rested her. She was startled at hearing some one ask, "Will you give me a few of those, please?"

Looking up, Joan saw the boy she had noticed from the window. He had a nice face, she decided in her impetuous way. She decided, too, that something was troubling him. His eyes wore a half troubled, half defiant expression, and they were not naturally defiant eyes, the girl felt sure. "Are you fond of violets?" she asked.

"Yes, isn't every one?" the boy asked with a smile, that won Joan at once. "They are my mother's favorite flowers," he added, "and I am going to send her a few in a letter and tell her about the Juniper Inn. Nicols, my tutor, has been talking to your brother. What a plucky set you are!"

Joan smiled, and looking at the violets she was arranging in clusters said, "Well, you see, we-all

had to do something, so, when this plan suggested itself, why, we took the courage of our convictions."

"The hardest sort of courage, sometimes. Must you go in? See here, can't we be friends?"

"Why, yes," and Joan held out her hand in a friendly fashion; "at least, I should think we might."

"Thank you," the boy said gratefully; "I am Scott—Scott Newton." His grasp of her hand was warm and sincere, but his evident hesitation in giving his name puzzled Joan. She wondered whether she had acted too impulsively. Theo was always accusing her of doing so. "And I am Joan Clayton," she said a little slowly.

"And your brother is Jack?"

Joan nodded.

Scott stood a moment looking up at the rambling old house, with its generous verandas and air of simple comfort and warm hospitality, then he asked abruptly, "Miss Joan, do you ever take people to board—regularly, you know?"

"Oh, no," the girl answered hurriedly.

Scott sighed. "It's mighty jolly looking here, —and homelike."

"It ought to be the last because it is a home, the realest sort of one, when mamma is well."

They went back to the house together. At the door Joan left Scott, and went on up to her mother's room. When she came down some time later, Scott was giving Bob a bicycle lesson on the road before the inn.

"Oh, Joan," Jack called from his clerk's table, and Joan went indoors.

"They want to stop on here at the inn for a while," Jack said, with an explanatory gesture toward the road where Scott was giving Bob his lesson, while Nicols looked smilingly on. "They're down here on the boy's account—nervous trouble of some sort I fancy—and he's taken a fancy to the inn."

"But Jack, it's quite impossible!" Joan exclaimed.

"So I told Mr. Nicols. He seems a pleasant fellow—knows a lot, I reckon. I wouldn't mind being in that Scott's shoes until I'd got an education."

"There's a pinch in them somewhere for him," Joan said.

"How do you know?" her twin asked.

"Oh, because," Joan answered confidently.

"I wonder what—I declare, Jack, he looks happier already. I wish—but it's quite impossible."

"Quite," Jack agreed.

Scott's face was bright and alive with fun. He had stepped back a little in response to Bob's earnest request to be allowed to try it all by himself, and with the sudden ignominious ending of the attempt, Scott's laugh rang out, boyish and hearty.

Mr. Nicols had come up on the porch, and was standing just outside the door. He turned now to the twins. "I haven't heard him laugh like that since—for months," he said slowly.

Joan's throat tightened suddenly. She turned away to give Tony some directions. "Poor boy!" she said to herself in the motherly tone she was wont to use toward her twin. She didn't mean Tony.

CHAPTER IV

THE JUNIPER INN

SEVERAL mornings after, Joan, walking slowly homeward from the little sleepy town, heard the sudden sharp tinkle of a bicycle bell behind her, and, turning, saw Scott riding swiftly toward her.

"How's business?" he asked, dismounting to walk beside her.

"Fa-ir, thank you. How do you like it down here?"

"It's all right, but I'm going to like it still better presently."

"You find the hotel comfortable?" Joan asked.

"Comfortable enough. It suits Nicols all right, but I'm coming out to the Juniper Inn."

"But ——" Joan gasped.

"I mean it, Miss Joan. At home, I've rather a reputation for getting my way. Stow me in any corner you like. I'll wait on the table ——"

"I fancy Tony might have something to say to that," Joan suggested.

"Help Jack—do anything you like," Scott finished.

Joan laughed. "You certainly are determined. Well, I'll consult my sister Theo and Jack."

"As you like. I suppose there are certain formalities to be observed, but I intend to stay in any case."

"But suppose ——" Joan began.

"What's the use supposing, once a fellow's got his mind made up?" Scott asked, with a smile, but the look in his eyes belied the confident note of his words. "Seriously, Miss Joan," he added soberly enough, "I do hope you won't turn me down."

"I'll see what can be done," Joan said.

She called a family council the moment she reached home, leaving Scott outside with Bob, who had welcomed him cordially.

"He's a very high-handed young gentleman, to say the least," was Theo's verdict, when Joan had finished stating the case.

"I don't think he means it that way, though it sounds so," Joan said thoughtfully; "but he's lonely and homesick and unhappy."

"Joan is never so happy as when she is

helping some lame dog over a stile," Jack said.

Theo's eyes softened. "I know it," she said; "and I reckon, Jack, we'll have to let her have her way in this, as in everything else of late."

"I tell you," Jack said, "we'll see Dr. Burley this afternoon. He's met Scott—he said so yesterday."

Joan appeared very well satisfied with this decision. "I'm sure the doctor won't object, so sure that I think we might tell Scott. He's waiting outside." She set to making plans for their guest's accommodation at once. "We'll give him the room back of the parlor, Theo," she said; "and, oh, Theo, it means a certain amount coming in regularly."

"I know," Theo said again. "I thought of that. Dear me, Joan, this tavern scheme of yours is leading us into strange ways. Well, perhaps it won't be too unendurable for a while and it does mean the possibility of more comforts for mamma. I don't believe I could agree to it, but for that."

"How much shall we charge?" Joan asked.

After some discussion, they decided to charge Scott twenty-five dollars per month.

"Probably it will be *the* month," Jack said.
"He will be tired of it by then."

"So will we," Theo remarked.

"No to both of you," Joan declared, running away to tell Scott their decision.

He drew a long breath when she had finished.
"I can't thank you all, Miss Joan. I put up a pretty good bluff, maybe, but all the same I felt mighty shaky inside. Now I'll ride back and tell Nicols and see about getting my traps out here."

The room Joan had spoken of faced South and West. It was big and square, with deep wide fireplace and long door-like windows; the furniture was of old-fashioned mahogany; on the wall hung a few old family portraits, one a slender-waisted, dark-eyed beauty of a hundred years before, the Joan Clayton of an earlier day.

"I wonder," Joan said to Theo, as they inspected the room together, "if it's too sombre for a boy?"

Theo glanced slowly about her. "I love this room," she said. "Nannie says it's the very counterpart of the best bedroom in the old house over on the Island. She says more fine ladies and gentlemen have looked into that mirror than in any other in the whole State of Georgia."

“Don’t you wish it was a magic mirror?” Joan asked, drawing her sister over to it, “and that we could catch a glimpse of some of those old time beauties and gallants?”

But gaze as they might into the depths of the old time-worn glass, only two faces looked out at them in return. Two girlish faces, grave and questioning now, but with a hint of laughter in the dark eyes, and the same proud carriage of the small shapely head, characteristic of more than one Clayton belle of other years.

With a little impatient sigh, Theo turned away. “Oh, dear, if only the candles in those sconces were lit and the curtains were drawn and you and I were dressing for a ball, Joan.”

Joan took two or three little dancing steps toward the door. “If”—she said—“Oh, there’s the doctor, Theo. I hear the wheels of the gig, Sister Anne, and I perceive a cloud of dust.”

“You waylay him before he comes up-stairs,” Theo said. “You always can wheedle him better than any one else.”

So Dr. Burley was drawn unsuspectingly into the family dining-room where this latest plan was unfolded to him.

“Now look here, my lady,” he protested, “did

you ever hear that story about the camel who wanted to put his head into his master's tent?"

"Yes, sir," Joan answered.

"Or the proverb about the inch and the ell?"

"I believe so," Joan said.

"And the application thereof?"

"Please don't," Joan urged.

Whereupon Dr. Burley said "Humph!" then added, "You know how you coaxed me into saying yes the other day, miss, and I feel an inward conviction that you're going to do it to-day, but to-morrow ——"

"To-morrow isn't here yet," Joan observed meditatively.

It was one of the doctor's favorite remarks, and his eyes twinkled now at Joan's quoting it. "Well," he said, "I'll think it over and let you know to-morrow."

"Oh," Joan cried, "I'm afraid that won't do, doctor, because, you see, we—that is, I told him he might come for a while. I was so sure you'd think it a good plan. You know it would be good for Jack to have a companion of his own age like that, wouldn't it?"

A moment the doctor stared down at Joan's flushed face, then his laugh rang uncontrollably

out. "Upon my word!" he exclaimed, "I like your way of asking advice, miss. Well, for the boy's sake—he seems rather a decent chap—I suppose I shall have to consent, but I wonder now what you-all would do if I put my foot down on it? By the way," the doctor looked back, his hand on the door, "Scott happened to tell me the other day about his unsuccessful attempt to get board at an inn not far from here and I suggested to him that he try again;" then the doctor went up-stairs to his patient.

"Oh, Joan," Margie called, "here's 'our new boarder'—that's what Bob says he is. Bob says he 'proves very highly of his coming.'"

"Oh, he does, does he?" laughed Joan, and went to welcome Scott. "Your corner is ready," she told him. "You need not begin waiting on table until ——"

"Until ——?"

"You're requested to. Our head waiter has no need of an assistant at present. And now shall the clerk show you to your room?"

As Jack threw open the door of the big room back of the parlor, Scott gave a low exclamation of pleasure. "I say," he said, laying his hand a moment on Jack's arm, "you're no end kind to a

fellow," and he looked about, noting the home-like touches Theo and Joan had given the pleasant, spacious room.

"We want you to be happy here ——" Jack hesitated.

"Scott, of course," the other boy said, his face saddening suddenly, unaccountably to Jack, who had noticed the change.

Scott went over to the fire blazing on the hearth, as only pine knots can blaze. Stooping down, he held out a hand to the warmth. "You are no end kind," he repeated, but there was no lightness in his tone now.

"When would you like your supper?" Jack asked, a little constraint showing in his voice. What on earth had he said to upset the fellow?

"Why, when you have yours, of course," Scott answered. Then, a thought striking him, said, "I hope you don't expect me to eat all by my lonely, though if you all would prefer that arrangement, why, I ——"

And Jack could not refuse a hearty "Certainly not; only I warn you supper is very much of a family meal with us, and more than ever so lately since we've been so busy during the day. It seems to have grown into a sort of a

jollification, at which each one is a guest of honor."

Scott nodded. "I understand. It sounds as jolly as all the rest of it. And you thought to make me eat in solitary grandeur? I guess not. What time does this family reunion, so to speak, take place?"

"It is something of a movable feast," Jack answered, "depending upon how many people Nannie has had to cater to during the afternoon. I reckon she'll strike it about quarter to seven to-night."

"All right," Scott said, "I'll be ready."

"You know," Jack explained to his sisters, "somehow I just had to ask him."

Theo gave an impatient little shrug. "We did not bargain for this," she protested.

"But it would be so lonely for-him, eating all by himself," Joan said. "I don't believe, Theo, that you'll find it so bad. He's a nice boy and a gentleman."

"Yes," Theo assented, "but he is a stranger."

And Scott, sitting before the fire in his own room at that moment, was thinking that same thing. He was a stranger in a strange land. A sudden overwhelming sense of homesickness had

swept over the boy. Presently he gave a short laugh, not a merry one. "Only I wouldn't go home if I could. How can I go until—and it is so hard to decide."

He had risen to pace restlessly up and down the room; and now he came to a pause before the portrait of that Joan Clayton of long ago. Despite the high dressed powdered hair, the quaint old-fashioned gown, it was wonderfully like the Joan Clayton of to-day, the girl who just a day or so before had explained so simply how they had merely taken the courage of their convictions. The dark eyes above him looked down with the same intent earnest gaze the girl had lifted to him from among her violets. "The courage of one's convictions," the boy said drearily. "But what are mine? Have I any convictions or any courage left?" Still the eyes in the portrait held him, held him against his will. There were violets upon the table beneath, beside them he had stood a photograph of his mother. Hers were dark eyes, too. This latest photograph showed them inexpressibly sad ones, and they, too, were like the eyes in the portrait. Scott took up a few of the violets, fastening them in his buttonhole, his fingers were trembling.

"Yes, I know," he broke out abruptly, speaking now to the face in the oval silver frame on the table. "I know how it'll hurt. But what else can I do? I—I'm only sixteen. How can I start out in life handicapped so?"

He went over to the fireplace and, leaning his arms on the high old mantel, stared moodily down into the dancing flames. From the garden came the sound of children's voices, Joan's calling to Bob, Tony's clear whistling. What would they say—his new friends—if they knew? There would be pity in Joan's eyes, at least pity and, for him, a little scorn.

The sound of a light scratching on the door roused Scott. Opening it, he found Chevalier waiting there. Like Bob, Chevalier thoroughly approved of the new boarder.

"Halloa, old fellow!" Scott said, patting the dog's glossy head. Chevalier was a handsome fellow and a perfect gentleman; he was quick to see now that something ailed Scott. Standing up so that his forepaws rested on the boy's shoulders, Chevalier studied the restless uncertain young face, a slow wagging of his tail expressing his sincere sympathy.

"What is it? What do you want?" Scott

asked, holding the fine head between his hands. "On my honor, I believe you're sorry for me. Well, you may well be, old fellow." Slowly the hardness, the bitterness left the boy's face. Stooping, he laid it against the dog's head. "I don't know what to do, Chevalier. Oh, I wish you could help me decide."

But Chevalier did the next best thing. He suggested in the plainest manner that what Scott needed at present was a run in the fresh air with himself, a suggestion Scott acted upon at once.

At Jack's desk, Scott stopped a moment. Jack was reading. "You like this sort of thing?" Scott asked, pointing to the volume of Ancient History Jack was bending over.

"Yes, don't you?" the latter asked.

Scott shrugged his shoulders. "A good live up-to-date American interests me a deal more than any number of musty old dead Romans. Now Nicols is on intimate terms with all those old fellows, knows a heap more about them than any of his fellow creatures of the present age."

Jack laughed. "Well, they are interesting old codgers. I wish I knew more about them."

"I don't," Scott admitted frankly, as he and Chevalier went on out of doors.

Out in the road, Bob was playing ball with Margie. "Shall I give you a catch?" he asked politely, as Scott appeared.

"No, but I'll give you one," and Scott sent the youngster such a clean-cut, well-aimed ball that he fairly howled with glee.

By the time Joan came to call Bob and Margie indoors, Scott had succeeded in throwing his troubles aside for this time, sending them further and further from him with each toss of the ball, as he sent it higher and higher through the clear still air.

"Really," Bob confided to his sister, "I'm more'n ever glad we let him stay. I'm perfectly convinced he's going to make a very desirable addition to our little comp'ny."

Whereat Joan, as was her reprehensible way, collapsed in a spasm of mirth, which was in no way lessened by the sight of Bob walking off in high disdain.

It was a merry supper in spite of the presence of a stranger. Mrs. Clayton was better, business had been fairly good that day, and it was only two weeks until Christmas.

"Though ours isn't going to be a bit of a grand Christmas," Joan said, "is it, Theo? But it's going to be the gladdest sort of a one. Theo, wouldn't it be nice if the Juniper Inn could afford to keep open doors for that day?"

"If it hasn't closed its doors for good before then," Jack added.

"No," Theo said, with an emphatic little nod. "It wouldn't be a bit nice. For that day, at least, let us retire into private life."

"How dreadfully unreconcilable you are," Joan sighed.

Supper over, the twins proceeded to go over the day's accounts. Joan had provided a very imposing looking ledger, wherein each day's earnings and expenses were entered with much care and pride.

"Three dollars and seventy-five cents to the good to-day," Joan announced, as Jack closed the ledger.

Scott had asked permission to bring his lessons out there to study. He dreaded the silence and loneliness of his own room, and he looked up now, something of wonder in his smile. From Joan's tone, it might have been three hundred and seventy-five dollars.

She smiled back at him across the table. "I reckon that doesn't mean very much to you," she said.

"I—I've never earned as much as that in my whole life."

"I suppose because you've never had to. One can do most anything one has really got to do."

"Can one?" Scott pushed his book aside. "Well, here's one person, anyhow, who can't see through this beastly problem, though he has to, before ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

Jack drew the algebra eagerly toward him. Presently Joan's laugh broke the quiet. "I know it must surely be a tough one. See," she pointed to her absorbed twin. Jack had buried both hands in his thick hair and now was tugging at it quite unmercifully. "The harder the lesson, the harder he pulls," Joan said. "Fortunately it appears to be in fairly tight."

Fifteen minutes more and Jack looked up quietly. "I've got it," he said simply. "It is a beauty."

"Not from my point of view," said Scott, as he pushed paper and pencil toward Jack. "Fire away, please," he said.

And Jack "fired away."

Scott gave a low whistle. "You are a clever one. By Jove! you've the gift of making the other fellow see a thing, too."

Jack turned the pages of the algebra lingeringly. "You're going to catch it worse next time."

"I dare say. Stupid stuff—tiresome business anyhow, a good deal of this getting ready for college. You going?"

"I ——"

"Of course he is some day," Jack's twin answered for him.

" 'Some day all our birds will sing,' " Jack said gravely.

CHAPTER V

SHOPPING

It was remarkable how easily Scott fitted into the family life at the old tavern. Every morning he rode over to the hotel for a couple of hours with his tutor, always watched out of sight by Jack.

"I declare," the latter said one morning to Joan, as Scott's bicycle vanished around the bend in the road, "that fellow fills me daily with envy, if not with 'hatred and all uncharitableness.'"

Joan balanced her dust brush on the palm of her outstretched hand. "Anyhow," she said, more as if trying to convince herself than in answer to Jack, "you're ahead of him, as it is. If only Mr. Lawrence hadn't had to go away, you would have gone on finely. I really think it was decidedly unclergyman-like in him to go and need a change of scene, just after he had arranged to help you with your Latin and Greek. Never mind, you'll get there somehow, and you're young yet."

"Sometimes," Jack said, "I have a sort of conviction myself that sooner or later I will get there. Then again all the roads seem marked 'No Thoroughfare.'"

"Well, they're not," Joan insisted. "Jack, where shall we have our Christmas tree?"

"Sometimes, I think your mind must be constructed on a kind of merry-go-round principle," Jack laughed. "From college to Christmas trees is something of a jump, all in one breath, too."

"I take my subjects alphabetically. They both begin with C, you notice."

"I don't quite 'C,'" Jack began; but at that Joan fled.

"Theo," she said, meeting her sister at the head of the stairs, "where shall we have the tree this year?"

"A tree, without mamma!"

"Just a little one for the children. They would be so disappointed if we didn't. Mamma said yesterday that she hoped they wouldn't lose their Christmas."

"We can't very well have it in the 'long room,' as we usually do," Theo said. "There's the parlor, Joan. Why not have it out in the old ball-room?"

"The very place!" Joan cried delightedly. "Tony must clean it out to-day."

So between times that day, Tony swept and cleaned out the big detached old ballroom, standing at the lower end of the back garden, and started a fire in the great brick fireplace.

Scott, coming out to see what was going on, found Joan whirling Bob down the long room to the quick tune Tony was whistling over his work. She came dancing toward him, her eyes bright and cheeks glowing.

"Isn't this my dance?" Scott asked. And Bob with evident relief surrendered his place.

"I don't care partic'larly about dancing this morning," he explained; "I was only doing it to 'blige Joan."

"Candor is one of the Hon. Robert's most prominent traits," Joan remarked as Bob climbed up on to one of the high window seats, from which he smiled benevolently down upon the others.

"We-all are going to have a Christmas tree," he announced. "I don't suppose it'll be as jolly a tree as if mamma was well and could see to it, but I reckon Theo and Joan'll do their best, and, of course, Margie and I'll help."

"Bob's offers of help are rather alarming than

otherwise," Joan told Scott; and as they went back to the house, she described with great vividness those pasteboard signs, with their various inscriptions. She liked to make Scott laugh, as he laughed then. At the steps, she halted. "I'm going Christmas shopping this afternoon," she said gaily.

Scott started. "Only five days more, aren't there? Thursday to Tuesday. Last year we had—Miss Joan, may I go shopping with you this afternoon?"

"Why, yes, if you like. It won't be much like a shopping expedition in New York; but all the same it'll be Christmas shopping."

"You are sure I won't be in the way?"

"Of course you won't," Joan assured him.

And as Joan had said, the Christmas spirit was there when they set out that afternoon, even though the sky was blue and soft, the sunshine warm, and the air sweet and heavy with the scent of roses.

Jack came to the door to see them off, and Theo came running after to say, "Remember, Joan, no horns nor firecrackers."

"Firecrackers!" Scott repeated, "why we're not getting ready for Fourth of July."

"We-all have them at Christmas time down here," Joan explained. "Bob'll miss them dreadfully—I can't say that Bob's sisters will very much, not the older ones."

They found the streets of the little town filled with shoppers, both white and colored and the stores gay with Christmas goods. More than once Joan lingered longingly over something attractive and equally unattainable, but she made her simple purchases with a zest good to see.

"I reckon Margie has got to have a doll, if it's only a tiny one," she said, "though goodness knows, when Theo or I will find time to dress even a tiny one. It isn't hard choosing for Jack ; first, last, and always he likes books."

"And Jack's twin?" Scott asked.

"Oh, Jack and I think alike on most subjects, as good twins should. We study together, that is, we have done so, until just lately. Neither of us has found much time for studying of late, though Jack has made time for a little. Jack set his heart on going to college."

"And you?" Scott asked again.

"I'm with him there, too," laughed Joan—"with him and for him."

"All brothers and sisters aren't like that—worse luck. I mean in thinking alike."

"All brothers and sisters aren't twins. It's very nice, being a twin."

"My sister and I used to be no end chummy."

"I didn't know you had a sister!"

"No, you've been mighty good, all of you, about taking me on trust. See here, Miss Joan," Scott stopped before a store window, "what's the matter with that doll for Margie? She seems to be dressed to kill."

Joan came closer to investigate the doll indicated. "She's a darling," she said, smiling down at the golden-haired, blue-eyed little lady, "but I'm afraid she's rather too expensive a young person for Margie."

Scott bent lower to examine the price ticket attached to the doll's fluffy white skirt, then he turned to his companion. "See here, Miss Joan, I haven't objected to a single one of your purchases, now have I?"

"Why, n-no," Joan answered wonderingly, "but why ——?"

"Should I, is that what you mean? I really don't know of any reason. But, anyhow, now you must give me free play, too, with mine.

Maybe that doll is as anxious to get out to the Juniper Inn as I was. At any rate, that's where she's going."

And before Joan could remonstrate, she found herself following Scott into the store, where with true masculine directness of method he wasted no time in buying the doll.

"But all the same, you shouldn't have done it," Joan protested, as they stood waiting for the doll to be wrapped up.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Oh, because."

"Do you mean to say that if I want to play Margie is my small sister, you are going to object. What's Christmas time for but all such games?"

And Joan yielded the point. "Margie's going to be the happiest child in Christendom," she said, as they turned away. "Don't you think it fun, carrying the parcels?" she added, "when they are Christmas bundles, I mean. Of course, if they were groceries, it wouldn't be half the fun to go home to-night with all these packages. Why I don't believe Bob would care to recognize me."

"And now about Bob," Scott said. "Margie

being my small sister, naturally Bob must be my small brother. I should suggest a baseball outfit for him. I give you my word, he needs a new ball and we might as well go the whole thing."

"Indeed ——" Joan began.

"You're not behaving half as well about my shopping as I did about yours," Scott declared.

"I think we ought to be starting home, indeed I do."

"But I can't go until I've finished, and we've got to get some candy, too. Whoever heard of going shopping Christmas, or otherwise, and not buying some candy to take home?" Scott said.

But at last he consented to turn homeward, Joan pleading that it would be getting dark soon, and that Theo would be worried.

As they stopped at a crossing to let a team pass, Joan suddenly drew back with a low exclamation of pity and dismay. "Oh," she said, "isn't it too dreadful! I can't bear to see them."

After the dray had followed the chain-gang. The striped-clad prisoners were mostly colored, but here and there a white face showed among them.

"Isn't it ——" Joan turning to her companion stopped abruptly. Scott was staring straight ahead of him with hard defiant eyes, his face white, lips drawn.

As Joan hesitated, he made an impatient gesture. "Can't we—get away from—this?"

Joan turned down the side street. "This won't take us much out of our way."

For some minutes neither of them spoke; Joan's thoughts were in a whirl. At last Scott slackened his pace. "I beg your pardon," he said, trying to make his voice sound as usual, "I did not mean to run you like this."

"I like to walk fast," Joan assured him, in such a breathless voice that they both had to laugh, which helped matters somewhat.

"If only one could walk away from one's self," Scott said.

"As easily as one can from other people, though, as I know to my sorrow, there are times when that is equally impossible."

"I hope this isn't one of them?" Scott stopped to shift his numerous bundles. "We don't want the youngsters to see these things, Miss Joan."

"No, indeed; I don't believe they'd want to

themselves really. The not knowing beforehand is one of the pleasures of Christmas."

"Miss Joan, you-all—there I'm getting quite Southern—you-all won't mind my being here at Christmas? I can't go home just yet, but, if you'd rather, say the word, and I'll cut away over to the hotel. It would be a bit dreary, I'll admit. Nicols doesn't mind, so long as he has his books."

"Of course, you must stay at the inn," Joan answered heartily. "We-all wouldn't hear of anything else. It won't be a bit a grand Christmas—we never do have grand ones, anyhow—but this year, on account of mamma, it will have to be much simpler than usual; but I promise you it'll be Christmas, all right, and it'll be ever so nice for us all having you with us."

"I don't like grand Christmases," Scott said; "ours never were ——"

"Won't your ——" Joan hesitated. "Won't Mrs. Newton expect you home?"

"Mrs. Newton! Oh, my mother," Scott shook his head. "I wrote her the other day that I couldn't come—not yet."

They had nearly reached the inn and down the road through the fast gathering dusk came two

hurrying little figures, very eager, very breathless.

"Well, you-all have been shopping!" Bob exclaimed. "I'll help carry."

"Not on your life," Scott declared. "Why, you might manage to break your new slate. There, I've let the cat out of the bag, haven't I?"

Bob's eyes opened wide with scornful amazement; Margie's with pained disappointment. Was Scott that kind of a boy after all? "It's holiday time now," Bob said loftily.

"But it won't be always, and what little boy and girl could wish for a more useful and entertaining present for Christmas than a nice new slate and slate pencil apiece?" Scott's tone was delightfully pedagogic.

Bob sniffed scornfully. "Margie and me ain't such sillies."

"Besides," Margie added, "we-all have slates. Maybe, if you took them right back, they'd change them for something else," she suggested hopefully.

"I don't believe," Bob cast an inquiring glance over Scott's numerous packages, "that you've got a single slate there, nor a pencil neither—so there!"

"Bob!" exclaimed Joan.

"Well, I don't," Bob reiterated.

"What have you youngsters been doing all the afternoon?" Scott asked, by way of changing the subject.

"Oh, nothing much," Bob's nonchalance was a little overdone, "we-all just waited a little on some people."

"Robert!" Joan exclaimed.

"Well, you see, Tony wasn't there, so Jack told me to go look him up—and—and—Margie and I couldn't see him anywhere, could we, Margie?"

"N-no," Margie flushed guiltily.

"I must speak to Tony," Joan said gravely.

Bob fidgeted. "Maybe—you'd better—not. It's perfec'ly true. We couldn't see him, really—but then we'd—shut our eyes first—*on purpose*."

Scott put his parcels down and laughed until the tears came.

"You—you mustn't," Joan protested. "This is serious." But her own voice was far from steady, and she was obliged to bite her lips to keep them at all under control. "I shall have to turn you over to Jack, Robert."

Jack was waiting in the doorway of the inn. "Please, missis," he said gravely, "the next time

you go walking, will you kindly take those young ones, or the Juniper Inn with you. I am not very particular as to which you choose—but to be left with all three on one's hands is too much for any mere mortal."

Joan sat down on a bench just inside the door.

"The Hon. Robert has confessed the error of his ways."

"The little wretch! I sent him to find Tony. Presently he reappeared in the long room, not exactly in Tony's shoes, but in his jacket and apron. Upon my word, it actually trailed—the apron, I mean, though the jacket wasn't much better—and there he was, prepared to wait upon those people. They must have thought we were running a free show, especially when Margie made her appearance with another apron tied gracefully about her neck, instead of her waist."

"It was too long the other way," Margie explained.

"I'd have given them both a good shaking, only there were people about," Jack declared wrathfully.

"They ought to be sent to bed at once, without any supper," Joan said, wiping her eyes. "Really, you mustn't laugh," she said to Scott.

"I don't see why he should, or you either," Bob said gloomily; "but you-all always are laughing at a fellow. Margie 'n' me've been trying ever 'n' ever so long to get a chance to wait on some people—it's no end of fun. Tony wasn't there, truly, and we did start to look for him, and then I saw it was just our chance. 'It's a great thing to not only rec'nize one's op'tunity, but to grasp it,' I heard a man say the other day right there in the long room."

"Great Je-hosh-a-phat!" Jack ejaculated, while Joan and Scott went off into fresh paroxysms of laughter.

Bob fairly glared from one to another. "I'd like to know what's funny in that?" he demanded. "And I brought the tray in on my head fine. I've been practicing with a shingle and a cup of water ever since we-all started to running a tavern. Of course Margie had to try and do it too—girls are ter'ble im'ta-ta-tive—and hers tipped off in the entry. It did make consid'able clatter and the glass broke and the milk went all down her face."

"My ~~apron~~ tripped me up," Margie said soberly

"But I went back for more. I wasn't afraid of Nannie," Bob said.

"You were both very naughty children. You must never, never do such a thing again," Joan said, speaking as severely as was possible under the circumstances.

"You and Jack are always saying that," Bob protested. "Anyhow, I don't b'lieve I care about waiting on folks any more. It's stupid being called cute by a lot of silly women—and ——"

"And kissed," Margie supplemented innocently.

"So the Hon. Robert did get his come-uppance then and there," Joan laughed. "It strikes me, Jack, that in view of that, we might let him off this time. Did you get fussed over, too, Margie?"

"She didn't come in, 'cause when she made all that racket, Jack came. It was when I went in to get the orders they ——" and Bob's look of disgust finished the sentence quite completely.

"Well, shall we let them both off this time?" Joan asked her twin.

"*This* time," Jack repeated, a warning emphasis on the *this*.

Joan ran up-stairs to find Theo. "Has Jack told you about those outrageous children?" Theo demanded.

"Yes, but I don't think they meant any harm. Really they won't do it again."

"I should hope not. If you could have seen them! This tavern scheme is not good for them, at any rate."

"They'll quiet down after a bit," Joan said hopefully. "Theo, I've had the nicest time shopping. I got everything on my list—and Theo, I couldn't help it, but Scott would buy things for the children. He got the dearest doll for Margie."

"But I'm sure mamma would not like——" Theo began.

They were in their own room and Joan pulled her sister down beside her on the broad old lounge. "I think," she said slowly, "that if mamma knew, she would not mind. I feel sure he is trying to act as if this were his home, as if he had a right to be here to have a share in our Christmas. Theo, he is so unhappy—poor boy. This afternoon——" Joan stopped abruptly; somehow, not even to Theo, could she speak of that incident at the crossing.

CHAPTER VI

A BOX FROM HOME

SCOTT did not offer to go to town with Joan again, nor did he go alone, announcing a day or two later, that his holidays had begun, too. He was very willing to act as substitute for Jack, setting the latter frequently at liberty to retire to the grove with his books.

Joan could not fail to connect this reluctance to go in to the little town with that incident at the crossing. She did not like to think of it, nor to face her own thoughts on the subject, and she could not speak of it to her usual confidant, Jack.

Those were busy days at the old tavern. The Juniper Inn had naturally caused much comment in the neighborhood. Anything that the Claytons did could hardly pass unnoticed, least of all an undertaking of this nature. Nor was it all amused or amazed—according to the point of view—curiosity, but there was much genuine sympathy and interest felt and expressed for the young managers.

It was becoming quite the fashion to walk or ride out there for lunch or dinner. Nannie's cooking was becoming famous and the old woman, though outwardly never ceasing to deplore the downfall of the Claytons, inwardly rather exulted over the fact that folks were beginning to find out what she could do.

The Juniper Inn was not making money at the rapid rate Joan had anticipated, but they were doing fairly well. The simple luxuries they had longed for, for their mother, were now possible, and each day saw a little more added to the nest egg, which in Joan's mind was always referred to as "Jack's college money."

The day before Christmas, Joan was out in the old ballroom, bending over a pile of Christmas greens, when Scott came down the path from the house. He was whistling softly to himself, a fashion he had when perplexed, or in doubt.

"Oh, Miss Joan," he said, coming to a standstill in the open doorway of the ballroom, "may I come in, or are you too busy to be bothered?"

"You can come help me untwist this evergreen-roping—whatever could have possessed Tony to get it so tangled up—unless, as Jack insists, he is 'possessed.'"

"Jack said you were out here. I say, doesn't this stuff smell jolly?"

Joan nodded. "Don't you love Christmas?" she asked.

"I used to ——"

Joan glanced up quickly, sorry for her question.

"Miss Joan," Scott said, "do you like to open Christmas boxes?"

"I never had the chance. I should think it would be delightful."

"That depends. You shall have a chance at it now, if you will. I've just had a big one come by express from my mother."

Joan's face became radiant. "How lovely! I mean for you."

"It's a big fellow. I reckon it's pretty nice inside. Can you come now, or must you finish here first?"

Joan looked doubtful. "Come," she repeated.

"And open it. I've got the cover off."

"Open your box? I couldn't do that."

"Why not, Miss Joan? If you only would. Please. You'll be doing me no end of a favor," Scott urged.

Joan shook her head firmly. "Indeed, I can

do no such thing ;” then she said, her color coming and going, “ Please don’t think me too—too, well cheeky, as the Hon. Robert would say, but truly, don’t you think that your mother would rather you unpacked that box yourself ? ”

For a moment Scott did not answer ; he had reddened a little, and Joan was afraid she had vexed him.

“ I beg your —— ” she began.

“ It’s—it’s all right,” Scott said ; “ only, suppose that was precisely what I did not want to do, was trying to get out of, Miss Joan ? ”

Joan laughed. “ Jack is always telling me to beware of suppositions. I think I shall begin now.”

“ And you won’t come ? ”

“ I am very busy.”

“ I will wait.”

“ Please don’t. Run along now, and get through your —— ”

“ Work ? ”

“ Surely it isn’t as hard as that to open a Christmas box from home ? ” Joan asked soberly.

“ You don’t know how hard it is going to be,” Scott answered as he turned abruptly away, leav-

ing Joan bending over her Christmas greens with a face very far indeed from merry.

Scott went back to the house. In the middle of his own room stood the box, big and inviting, and addressed to

SCOTT C. NEWTON,
Brentwick, Ga.

The Juniper Inn.

Scott "Newton!" So she had accepted his decision. His letters had come to him enclosed in an envelope to Nicols, with only the one word "Scott" written on the inner envelope, the signature he himself had used up to his last letter. In that, he had signed himself "Scott Newton." That had been his only indication that at last the important decision was made, irrevocably made, he told himself now, staring down at the name on the box. Why, it had been as good as made, when he left New York, else how could he have given the name to Joan that first day. It was like his mother to have accepted it in this way. He might have known she would make no fuss about it. He almost wished she had given him a chance to explain to justify himself. His glance went from the name staring up at him from the

box to the eyes looking down at him from the portrait opposite. If only they were not so like the mater's. "Time will vindicate our faith in him, and restore the old honor to the old name," she had said to him on that dreadful day when—Scott threw himself face down, on the bed and cried, "Oh, I know it hurts, mother dear, but *I* must do it!"

He pulled himself together resolutely, for that box had to be opened.

In his last letter from his mother, she had written, "I am sending you a box which should reach you a day or two before Christmas and you may open it at once. Besides the books you asked for, for your young friends, I am sending them some simple remembrances on my own account, sending them with a great deal of love and gratitude for their kindness to you. I have marked each parcel carefully, and I would like, dear, to have you keep yours to open on Christmas day, giving, as you do so, a little thought to the old Christmases, when he was with us, and we were all so happy, because we were together. Helen writes very homesick letters from Paris. Poor child! Sometimes I think I shall have to let her come home, as she begs to do. But I

dread for her, what she refuses to dread for herself. You must not worry about me for I am quite well ; nor must you reproach yourself for staying away from me, only write often, and remember how much you have to do.

“ Always your loving mother,

“ HELEN CLARKE MONROE.

“ P. S. I have seen him. He sends love and would like to hear from you.”

Scott read the letter again now, before turning to the box, then he lifted off the cover.

Beneath the lid lay a spray of holly. Tied to it by a narrow red ribbon, was a little card, on which his mother had painted a tiny spray of forget-me-nots.

Scott laid it hastily aside ; his face was white and drawn as he knelt there, taking out one by one the white tissue paper wrapped parcels, tied with the narrow red ribbon.

Below them were the books. He had thought his list a generous one, but here were even more than he had sent for. He could see his mother choosing, buying them, refusing everything but the best. Last year how they had enjoyed their shopping together. Sometimes Helen had been of the party ; sometimes he and Helen had gone

alone, but Christmas eve he and the mater had slipped out for the few things that always at the last moment appear so absolutely necessary. It had been nearly dinner time before they got home. How brightly the house was lighted up. Helen was at the piano singing Christmas carols. He could hear the gay notes now, as they rang out through the warm bright house. Everywhere had been the holly and evergreen and the scent of the Christmas roses. The mater had worn one in her hair at dinner. Scott dropped the pile of books. If Christmas were only over!

The books were unwrapped; and in the interest of making his selections, of thinking how Jack's face would brighten over this, or that one, of wrapping up and labeling, the ache in his heart grew lighter.

Under the books were nuts and raisins, Christmas bonbons, and a great box of home-made candy, directed to Master Scott, from his respectful Martha.

So Martha had kept her word, and then it came across him that even she believed where he—but then Martha was a woman. It seemed easier for women ———

"Dinner!" Bob called outside the door. Bob's voice was jubilant, every note of it said Christmas.

"Shall you hang up your stocking?" Margie asked Scott, at the dinner-table. "We all always do."

"But we all aren't going to have our tree 'til to-morrow night," Bob said.

"I wish mamma could come," sighed Margie; "we've made a present for her, haven't we, Bob?"

"I should rather think we had," said Bob as he held up for inspection a very black and blue little thumb. "See where I hammered myself? But I don't mind. It's too big a present, I reckon, to hang on the tree and there can't anyone see it until mamma does."

Joan looked alarmed. "I don't know about that," she confided to Theo.

"Have you been very busy this morning?" Theo asked.

"I've been decorating the ballroom for our grand ball, Christmas night. There hasn't been what you would call a rush at the Juniper Inn so far to-day; in fact, in strictest confidence, there hasn't been a living soul."

"And hardly, any who were not alive, at least I hope not," Theo said.

"Who knows?" Jack suggested. "Perhaps the ghosts of the old time *habitués* of the tavern do come around now."

"Hush," Theo said, with a warning glance at the children. "Joan, can you sit with mamma this afternoon? I want to go to town on my own account."

"And we-all are going, too," Margie cried. "We" with Margie meant generally Bob and herself.

"Don't you want to go?" Scott asked, turning to Jack. "I'll be glad to clerk it if you do."

"Oh, please do, Jack," Theo cried. "Thank you so much, Scott. I was wishing for Jack and I know he was wishing to go himself."

"You are sure you won't mind?" Jack questioned. "I don't believe you'll be over-worked. I presume you will put in your time at good hard study."

"Now I wonder if you really presume any such thing?" Scott said. "I'd hate to think you were such a chump."

"Theo," Joan said, following her sister up-

stairs after dinner, "do you think we might tell mamma about Scott, now?"

"I asked Dr. Burley about that this morning," Theo answered, "and he said mamma had improved so steadily lately that he thought we might tell her of Scott's being here, and even allow her to see him, but that we had better say nothing about the tavern for a while longer. You tell her this afternoon—it'll be such a good chance."

Joan looked puzzled. "What shall I tell her? She'll think it very odd his being here at all."

"Dr. Burley said we might say Scott was a young friend of his whom he was much interested in."

"Well," Joan said, "I'll go get the children ready now."

She came back after a while. "I'm glad," she said, throwing herself back among the cushions on the lounge, "very glad that the doctor thinks mamma may see Scott."

"Scott isn't a bad sort of a boy," Theo admitted.

"Jack thinks him a very good sort."

"Then, of course, Jack's twin thinks so, too." Theo laughed.

"Jack is a very good judge of character," and Joan swung the curtain tassel back and forth. "Yes, I'm glad mamma can see him, for his sake."

Theo settled her hat pins more firmly and gave a few touches to her front hair. "You've got up some sort of a theory about that boy, Joan," she said. "I've seen it coming on for some time."

"You speak as if it were some kind of rash," Joan declared.

"Very likely it is kind of rash," Theo answered, taking up her gloves. "Did you say those children were ready?"

"They were ready, though I didn't say so, when I came up-stairs this last time."

"And that was quite ten minutes ago," Theo groaned. "Just look them over again, won't you, please, while I speak to mamma. Mamma wants to see them before we go. I certainly wish you were going, Joan."

"As companion or nurse, please, ma'am?"

"Both," Theo said candidly.

"Thank you," and Joan departed in search of Bob and Margie.

Hats and hair were not very awry, and in a

moment or two, they were dispatched up-stairs to their mother's room.

When Theo came down a moment after, she found Jack waiting in the hall. "What a lot you must've prinked," he remonstrated. "I thought you were never coming, and yet," he added, with brotherly frankness, "I don't see that you look very different from usual."

Theo's uplifted eyebrows were most expressive.

"You see," Jack hurried to say, "you always look all right."

Scott was standing at the front door. He turned now, a laugh in his eyes. "Miss Clayton's carriage waits," he announced pompously.

Miss Clayton glanced through the door to the road, and gave a very perceptible lift to her pretty nose. "I haven't a doubt of it," she said, "seeing that the festive steed attached to Miss Clayton's carriage waits much better than she does anything else. Here come the children, so we-all can start now, Jack."

Bob was holding out a hand. "Mamma gave us each four bits to spend. I tell you, we're going to have fun shopping this afternoon." He climbed up to the front seat of the old carry-all, making a show of holding Mollie in.

"You'd much better hold her up," Theo suggested. "If we were really humane people, we'd put the poor creature inside, and do the pulling ourselves."

"But we-all couldn't," Margie said seriously.

"Do hurry!" Bob cried. "Margie and me have got a lot to 'tend to," and he rattled the money in his pocket importantly.

"I wonder," Jack said gravely, as he helped Theo into the carry-all, "if it is safe for us to travel with so much money about. This road has seen more than one highway robbery in its day."

Margie looked frightened. "Maybe we-all can get home before dark."

"And if we don't, we won't have any money left by then, anyway," Bob assured her.

Which was certainly a very philosophical manner of looking at the matter, Jack remarked.

As they stood on the porch together, watching the others out of sight, Scott turned to Joan. "What a happy crowd you are," he said.

"Are we?" Joan answered. "A while ago, I thought we were a little down on our luck. Things do look brighter now. 'It's a long lane that has no turning,' you know."

"But I suppose there could be one without a turning, a tremendously long one," Scott said sombrely.

"It would have to end somewhere, though," Joan said.

"Yes, a long way off, out of sight."

"I refuse to philosophize, or theorize, or any other 'ize,'" Joan said. "It's the day before Christmas and what I've got to do now is to trim the mater's room with holly, also the hall down here, and dining-room. Do you know," she came a little nearer, "I have the loveliest Christmas present for you. You are to have it on Christmas day—a visit to mamma."

Scott looked rather startled. Like most boys, he had a dread of a sick room.

"I have so wanted you to see mamma, and mamma to see you," Joan said. "Now I must leave you to Chevalier's society."

"One might have worse company," Scott said, stroking the dog's head. Chevalier had a fashion of following Scott about. He seemed to understand that the boy was in trouble and in need of sympathy.

"Indeed one might," Joan agreed. "He's the dearest dog. His full name is Chevalier Bayard,

and he lives up to it, too, as few human beings could."

"*'Sans peur ; sans reproche,'*" Scott said slowly. "See here, old fellow, you ought to have a collar with your motto engraved on it."

Chevalier wagged acquiescence, as he stretched himself out at Scott's feet.

"If you need me about the tavern business, I shall be in mamma's room."

As she entered her mother's room a few moments later, Joan told herself joyfully that at last mamma was really beginning to look her old self.

"What a Christmas girl you are," Mrs. Clayton said. Joan's arms were full of evergreen and holly ; a spray of the latter was fastened in her dark hair.

"It comes every year, and yet it is always new," Joan said, depositing her burden on the floor. "Why, I've seen sixteen Christmases myself, but I'm just as eager over this one. You're a lot better to-day, aren't you, mamma?"

"Better! I am almost well," her mother answered. "I am living like a queen, these days. Theo says it is all right, and she is losing her worried look. Have we had a fortune left us?"

"We have had some good fortune," Joan laughed. "Just think, mamma, we have a boarder."

"A boarder! Joan, what do you mean?"

"Such a nice boy. Dr. Burley is much interested in him."

"A boy—a strange boy!"

"He doesn't seem at all strange, though he hasn't been here very long. He's from the North—Dr. Burley knows all about him and you ought to see how Chevalier loves him. You know, mamma, you've always said that Chevalier never makes mistakes about people."

"Joan, you take my breath away. How old is this boy?"

"About Jack's and my age. We would have told you before, mamma, but the doctor wouldn't let us. Scott, his name is Scott Newton, is down here for change of scene. It's been ever so nice, for Jack especially. Scott lends him books and helps him a lot with—with"—Joan caught herself up hastily—"with all sorts of things, companionship and—and so on."

"Joan, I must see this—this boarder of yours."

"You shall to-morrow. I know you'll like him."

Mrs. Clayton smiled. "So that is the 'friend' Bob has been talking about. I thought he seemed rather confused as to details concerning his new friendship."

"The Hon. Robert had been warned that you were not to be worried about anything until you were stronger. He thoroughly approves of our boarder and generously bestows a good deal of his society upon him."

"I understand the reason now for all these added comforts. Joan, I don't like it."

"Truly, mamma, if you knew how we-all enjoy having Scott here, even Theo, and she held out the longest—and he was so lonely down here, and he wanted to come so, I think it was as much on his account as ours that Dr. Burley agreed to it."

"I don't understand how it came about in the first place. Surely you had said nothing to the doctor about wishing to take a boarder?"

"No, mamma," Joan said, if only she might speak of the inn. "It was quite by accident. Scott saw the—the house—and took a fancy to it."

"It is to be hoped no one else will take such a strong fancy, if this is to be the result," Mrs. Clayton said.

"Please, mamma, you do not mind very much?"

"I think I shall reserve my opinion until I have seen this Scott and I must certainly have a talk with the doctor about it the next time he comes."

"That'll be day after to-morrow," Joan said, "and to-morrow you are going to see Scott. We-all are going to have our tree to-morrow evening. I wish you were coming to it. Theo and I are going to trim it to-night, after you are asleep."

"Not too late up, dear."

"We won't."

"It is to be in the 'long room'?"

"Not this year—out in the old ballroom."

Mrs. Clayton looked surprised.

"You can't think how pretty and Christmasy we've made it look," Joan said. "We thought we could be sure of not disturbing you out there. Tony is to furnish music for the occasion and Nannie is going to give us a real Christmas supper afterward. Theo and I are to take turns, sitting with you."

"Nannie shall stay with me. I want you all to have your fun together," Mrs. Clayton said.

"Well, we'll see," and Joan jumped up from her low chair by her mother's bed. "I reckon I'd best get to work at these greens. I haven't the down-stairs ones up yet."

When she went down-stairs again, Scott was at his post, Chevalier sitting solemnly beside him.

"Have you been worked, or bored, to death?" Joan asked.

"Neither, and I have taken in a whole dollar."

He came to help her in her work of decorating the hall and dining-room, roused out of his pre-occupation by her bright chatter.

They were just placing the last sprig of holly in place when carriage wheels sounded outside.

Joan ran to open the door. "Here's a crowd! I reckon they mean to stay for supper—dead heads, too, every one of them," she added.

"We'd have been home before," Theo said, as she came in, "only Molly kept going to sleep, and whatever she may be, she isn't a somnambulist. Why, you've got the trimming all done. How nice it looks!"

"We-all've had a beautiful time," Margie announced, enthusiastically.

"We don't subscribe to that entirely, do we, Jack?" Theo said. "You see," she explained,

sitting down on the hall bench, "by some cruel fate, early in the afternoon, the Hon. Robert ran foul of a five cent counter. Kindly divide fifty by five, and you'll see how many purchases he was able to make. Furthermore, he insisted on having each wrapped separately, they looking more that way, and on carrying them all himself. Naturally, he dropped one or more of them, with charming regularity, invariably, in the most inconvenient places. Fortunately, one of his purchases was a bottle of glue, so his mourning over various breakages was not without hope."

"And Margie?" Scott asked.

"For once in her life, she ignored Bob's advice. Had she followed it, it is doubtful if I'd have lived to tell the tale."

"Poor dear!" laughed Joan. "Well, supper's ready. You-all must be half starved."

CHAPTER VII

CHRISTMAS TREES

"Now doesn't it look lovely?" said Joan, as she stepped back to look up at the Christmas tree.

Theo sat down with a little sigh on the top of the step-ladder. "It certainly does," she agreed. "Oh, but I am tired. Joan, wasn't that a knock?"

"It is I," Scott said, as Joan opened the door a little ways. "I only came to bring—the mater sent these in the box for you all. May they go on the tree with the rest, please?" and he held out his armful of packages.

"But"—Joan drew back in surprise—"not all those, surely!"

"There aren't so very many," Scott said. "Anyhow, here's where they belong," he said, with a smile.

Joan threw open the door. "Come in, won't you, and help us arrange them and the others? It—it's perfectly dear of your mother to remember us, only she shouldn't have done it."

"My mother never does anything she should

not," Scott laughed. "You are sure you don't mind my coming in—you and Miss Theo?"

"We'll be mighty glad to have you," Theo called, "that is, if you'll turn in and work. We wouldn't let Jack come. He wanted to, but he was too tired."

"Jack isn't very strong," Joan said, "though he hates to admit it. Theo, just see what Scott has brought."

Theo's color rose. "Oh, you shouldn't have done it!"

"Why not, please?" Scott glanced from one sister to the other. "Besides, it was the mater who sent them, with her love and gratitude. Oh, she knows all about you and the Juniper Inn and how jolly good you've all been to me."

Both tone and words brought a softened look to Theo's eyes and, quite suddenly, her last faint objection to Scott's being there vanished.

She came down from the ladder. "We've only to hang the presents, then we're through. We'll let you do that, if you will. Any that are too heavy, we'll put at the bottom."

"As for instance—this!" Joan held up to view a square, much-wrapped-up package. "*The* present for mamma."

"It's not a dynamite bomb, though it looks like one," Theo said. "It's simply a harmless, also a useless little footstool, so simple in its—its architecture that it might have been constructed by one of our ancestors, the cave men. I'm telling you now, so that when it is sprung upon you in all its glory, you may be able to admire intelligently."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," Scott said, leaning down to take a parcel held up to him, and trying desperately not to think of the last time he had helped trim a Christmas tree.

In some slight measure he succeeded, for a few moments ; place, surroundings, companions, all helping him, but, North or South, the Christmas spirit is the same ; and Christmas trees, large or small, elaborate or simple, breathe forth the same spicy fragrance, exert the same magic influence, and in the end memory conquered. It was a very homesick boy who stood at last before the fire in his own room, looking down into the red coals.

It was still dark the next morning when Scott was awakened by a tap on his door, and heard Bob's voice calling excitedly, "Merry Christmas! I say, can't I come in?"

Lighting his candle, Scott slipped into dressing-gown and slippers and went to the door. As he opened it, he saw something long and lumpy dangling from the outside knob. "It's for you," Bob explained; "it's your stocking. Margie and me have had ours. I say, isn't Christmas great?"

Bob held a piece of sugar-cane in one hand, a peppermint stick in the other, his round rosy face beaming with good will. "Want me to help you 'xamine your stocking?" he asked.

"I'll be delighted," Scott answered. "It's mighty kind of you. I only hope you didn't get up so early just on my account?"

This view of the question decidedly surprised Bob. "You are cert'inly a very polite boy," he volunteered. "Now Jack, he said 'go along, you young nuisance'—Jack does use strong lan-language at times—and Joan said I was not to go bothering anybody, as if I'd be likely to bother any one!"

"As if!" Scott agreed.

"But this ain't early," Bob said. "I've been awake ever 'n' ever so long. I wonder why you can't ever sleep Christmas morning and why you're mostly so sleepy every other morning?"

Scott started up the fire and he and Bob sat down together on the hearth-rug and proceeded to investigate the contents of the stocking.

That he should have been remembered in this way touched the boy deeply and the simple things the stocking contained, the regulation apple and orange, nuts and raisins, candy, and down at the foot the pretty souvenir envelope opener, meant much to him.

"We-all don't have our really presents in our stockings," Bob explained; "we keep them for the tree at night, but it's fun having a stocking, too, isn't it?"

"Jolly," Scott assented, rather soberly.

And when he had sent Bob away, on the plea that he must dress, Scott lingered a moment, looking down at the little litter of things about him; then, getting up, he went over to the table and taking up the pile of gifts that had come in yesterday's box, he took them back to the hearth-rug.

They were books mostly, a few fine photographs of some of his favorite pictures, a scarf pin, a new scarf, some gold cuff links—these from his mother and Helen—an envelope enclosing a generous check from his God-father. He had

purposely left to the last, a small pasteboard box on which was written "For Scott, from his father." More than once, Scott laid the little box aside, as if unwilling, or unable, to make up his mind to open it. At last, with a sudden swift movement, he slipped off the elastic band and lifted the lid. Inside, in the soft cotton lay a fine seal ring, his father's ring, engraved with the family motto :

"Servabo fidem"

For some moments, the boy studied the ring ; then with a sigh, he laid it back in its box, and put the box away in his trunk.

It was with a face too sober for Christmas morning, that he met Joan, as she came toward him on the porch before breakfast. He was pacing up and down, Chevalier with him, but he came to a standstill at her "Merry Christmas !"

His own "Merry Christmas" in response was rather forced. "It's a beautiful morning," he added.

Joan pulled a rose from the vine clambering riotously about the porch, and stuck it in her hair. "Isn't it, and it's Christmas morning," she

added, somewhat inconsequently. "I'm afraid Bob routed you out at a most unearthly hour."

"Oh, I was glad to have him come. Thank you-all for the stocking, Miss Joan—I didn't expect it, it was jolly kind of you."

"We-all had one," laughed Joan, "even mamma."

"Breakfast," Margie announced from the doorway. "Theo says, please come right along."

"I don't suppose there will be any customers to-day," Theo remarked, as she turned the coffee, "at any rate it is to be hoped not."

"Who's going to church?" Jack asked.

"You'd better, and take the children; we can get along without a clerk this morning. Wouldn't you like to go too, Scott?"

"Thank you, I believe I'd rather not," Scott answered.

"You go along with Jack, Theo," Joan suggested; "I can look after mamma."

"So'll I," Bob declared. "I'd just as lieve, truly."

But this highly unselfish offer was not accepted; and later, Bob made one of the church-going party in the old carryall.

Scott spent the morning alone; Joan being up-

stairs in her mother's room, or else busy helping old Nannie out in the kitchen—Joan was by way of becoming quite a cook in these days.

Scott was out in the garden, when the church party returned. Hearing Bob calling him, he turned back to the house. "We-all've brought some one to see you," Bob said, as Scott appeared. Jack often declared Bob was going to be an editor some day, he was so fond of the editorial "we."

"To see me?" Scott repeated. "Oh," catching sight of a well-known figure in the hall, "Nicols."

"We met him at church," Bob explained blandly, "and we thought he looked lonesome, so we invited him to dinner."

"You mean Theo did, you young reprobate!" Jack expostulated.

Nannie had prepared a genuine Christmas dinner, at which Tony in all his glory, waited on them with his most pompous manner. Tony, without doubt, was a born waiter and had required little teaching.

Jack had not yet learned to view Tony in his regimentals calmly. Laundered to perfection, they no longer hung limp, but stood out stiff and

shining like a suit of armor Jack vowed, and called him "The White Knight," sometimes—sometimes "The White Squadron"; however, nothing disturbed the calm surface of Tony's dignity.

It was a jolly dinner and no one there enjoyed it more than the staid tutor. "Make yourself at home," Bob had told him graciously, from his seat beside Joan. "We-all like people to feel at home." And Mr. Nicols had thanked him quite gravely.

For once, at least, this quiet, studious man was finding certain very live young Americans quite as interesting as his dead old Romans. Jack, in particular, had caught his liking, and when dinner was over the two retired for a stroll about the garden, and a leisurely talk together.

"Will you be ready in about half an hour?" Joan asked Scott, as they left the table. "Mamma would like to see you then—and I know you are going to like seeing her."

"You are sure it will not trouble her?" Scott asked.

"Quite sure. She is getting stronger every day. Dr. Burley said yesterday, that her improvement of late had been remarkable. Only not a

word about the tavern—that's a forbidden subject still."

Very frankly, did Scott dread that visit to the sick room. With his first glance round it, his doubts vanished—why it wasn't a sick room at all! There were bowls of roses and low dishes filled with violets all about—there were the holly and evergreen belonging to the day—on the wide hearth a wood-fire crackled pleasantly. It seemed very restful and quiet there, far away from the stir and life of the house.

In a big easy chair, by the sunny south window, sat Mrs. Clayton; her smile, as she greeted Scott, holding out her hand to him, won the boy's heart at once.

"I wonder," she said, "if you've heard as much about me, as I have about you."

"I think I must have heard more," he answered taking the soft white hand, "anyway, I've heard. It's mighty good of you to let me come up here." He was glad now that he had come.

Joan had gone away, leaving them alone together. Scott thoroughly enjoyed that visit; he had not realized before how hungry he had been for the mother atmosphere.

And when Theo brought up her mother's teatray that evening, Mrs. Clayton said, "Theo, that's a very nice boy, but, my dear, he's carrying some burden too hard for a boy of his age to have to bear."

"So Joan says," Theo answered; "trust Joan to scent out when any one's in trouble." And Theo, when she went down stairs again, found herself studying Scott with new interest.

It had been decided to light the tree as soon as it grew dark enough. In spite of their remonstrances, Mrs. Clayton had insisted on Theo and Joan both going down. Nannie could look in on her now and then—she wanted them all to have their fun together—they should tell her all about it later.

It was Jack who went with Joan to light the candles. "On my word," he said, as they went out through the gathering darkness, "Mr. Nicols does certainly know an awful lot. Scott's a lucky fellow."

"Where have you been, all the afternoon?" Joan asked. "I've scarcely seen you."

Jack stopped to draw a long breath of the cool night air. "Well," he said slowly, "most

of the time in Rome, with side trips now and then over to Athens."

"And later in Spain, I reckon," his twin said. "I thought you had a far-away look—I know you've been doing a heap of castle building."

"Perhaps," Jack confessed, as they reached the ballroom.

One half was in shadow, but the fire of pine knots burning in the big fireplace at the upper end of the long room, filled the other half with soft shifting light.

Within its circle stood the tree, tall and graceful.

"And I wondered," Joan said, a little under her breath, "wondered, and worried too, whether we-all would be able to have any Christmas at all, to say nothing of a tree."

"And a dance," Jack laughed.

"I wish we could have had a real dance and asked some people. Next year, if we're all well we certainly must."

"And we're going to have a supper," Jack continued. "And we've you to thank for it all, Miss Go Ahead."

"No—the Hon. Robert ; he put the sign up."

"For mercy's sake, don't tell him so—he's conceited enough now—the little Jackanape."

"It isn't really conceit, Jack."

"Then it's a remarkably good imitation," Jack answered.

They had been lighting the candles as they talked; and now, in a moment or two, Jack asked, "Ready?"

"Ready," Joan said.

Going over to the door, Jack took down from its peg an old silver-mounted hunting horn, and gave a long low call.

In reply came a quick answer from Scott, and down the path from the house came a laughing, hurrying group—Bob leading the way, duly attended by his satellite Margie.

Mr. Nicols had been asked to stay for the evening's festivities, and had promptly accepted—the thought of a long quiet evening among his books, proving less attractive than usual.

In the doorway the party came to a sudden halt.

"Oh!" Margie cried rapturously.

And Scott exclaimed, "Jove, but that's pretty!"

The long low room with its trimming of green

palmetto leaves, with here and there the gleam of crimson holly berries, lit only by the dancing firelight, and the flickering, tiny Christmas candles; the fire dancing in the deep, old-fashioned fireplace; the sight and scent of the Christmas roses, standing on the high window ledges; the happy, laughing faces; and centre of all, the Christmas tree, glowing with light, gay with tinsel—all made a picture Scott felt he could never forget.

It was Bob who broke the silence that had followed those two first exclamations. "We-all did get a pretty tree, didn't we?" he asked, beaming benevolently upon the others. "And I've a present for every one." He drew Theo hastily aside. "Mr. Nicols can have one of those I bought for Margie—that one," pointing to a small parcel, hanging just above his head.

Theo hesitated; Bob had insisted on doing up all his own purchases in private, a deep and profound secrecy concerning gifts being one of the essentials of Christmas time to him. But after all, she reflected, it could not be anything very dreadful, and it would serve to set things going.

So, at her suggestion, Jack handed down the little clumsily-wrapped parcel. "It happens to

be labeled 'Margie,' " he said, as he handed it to Mr. Nicols, " but after all, ' what's in a name,' sir ? "

" A good deal, when it belongs to such a very nice young lady," Mr. Nicols said, bowing to Margie; then he proceeded to examine his present.

There was a good deal of superfluous paper, which when finally removed disclosed to the astonished tutor a small white china mug, on which was inscribed in gilt letters the words " For a Good Girl."

A moment he eyed it, then he dived frantically for his pocket-handkerchief.

" Is—is he crying ? " Margie whispered; for Mr. Nicols had turned abruptly away, his shoulders shaking with emotion of some sort.

But by now the room was ringing with laughter—Bob's present had set things going—there need be no fear of further stiffness that evening. Even Bob seeing the joke, joined as heartily as any one in the laugh against himself.

" Margie next," Theo told Jack; and Scott's present to her was handed to the little girl.

" Oh ! " Margie cried again; what else was there to say. Then she retired into the back-

ground, too blissfully content to give a thought to further possible riches.

Next came Bob's baseball outfit; and he promptly challenged Mr. Nicols to a game in the near future. "Do you a heap of good, sir," he declared. "Scott says you don't take nearly enough outdoor exercise, that you ain't half such a muff as you look."

Fortunately for his piece of mind, Scott failed to hear this quotation; but catching his tutor's eyes at that moment he wondered at the laugh in them.

"I rather think," Mr. Nicols said to Bob, "that you and I are going to be very good friends."

"I've no objection, sir," Bob answered; "shall we shake hands on it?"

One and all they enjoyed that evening. Very simple indeed had been most of the gifts interchanged; the pleasure they gave far outweighing their mere value.

Then there were the books, most of which Mrs. Monroe had sent.

"We-all never had half so many books at one time before," Joan said.

"Indeed no," Theo agreed.

Jack said nothing—at least as far as words

were concerned; his eyes certainly said a great deal. It is doubtful whether he caught much more of the talk and laughter about him. Sitting where the firelight fell brightest, he took hurried eager snatches from one after another of these new treasures.

To Theo and Joan, Mrs. Monroe had sent pretty morocco writing cases; to Bob, a game; to Margie, her heart's desire, a blue-eyed baby doll, with soft curls of real hair beneath the border of its lace cap. Two dolls at once! Margie felt as if she must be in a dream.

"I am going to take mamma her gifts now," Theo said, after all the other presents had been distributed, "she insisted that we should have ours first. Bob, if you'll come quietly, you can help carry them."

Bob looked about him graciously. "Would you-all like to see the present Margie and me made for mamma?" he asked.

Scott signified that the sight of that particular present was the one thing needed to complete their happiness.

Very soberly Bob undid the much-bewrapped parcel, producing at last a small square of rough pine board, to which had been nailed four sticks

for legs—not entirely equal as to length, and looking decidedly wobbly—the whole adorned with a thin smearing of vivid red paint.

“I’d ’ve put on more paint—only, there wasn’t any,” Bob explained.

“And Bob made it nearly all himself,” Margie added proudly. “He let me pick out the nails.”

“Inestimable privilege,” Jack murmured.

“And he let me hammer some, but I kept hitting my thumb,” Margie went on.

“Hit the wrong nail on the head, eh?” Mr. Nicols suggested.

“Yes, sir,” the little girl answered soberly, putting the injured thumb in her mouth. So far Margie had not developed a very strong sense of humor.

Scott bent to examine this specimen of Bob’s carpentering. “I-t it’s a footstool, isn’t it?” he asked, mindful of Theo’s coaching.

“Why, of course,” Bob replied; “I—we thought it would come in handy, now mamma’s getting better and able to sit up.”

“Mamma’s going to be mighty pleased, Bob, honey,” Joan assured him.

“Come on now, Bob,” Theo said, gathering up her parcels.

She and Bob were soon back. "Mamma's asleep," she said. "Nannie's keeping guard—here comes Tony, with his fiddle."

And down the path came Tony playing an old plantation jig, inherited with his fiddle from his grandfather, who had been a famous fiddler, and much in demand, in his day.

As he stood in the open doorway, his black eyes rolled up until scarcely anything but the whites showed, all his white even teeth gleaming, his slim body swaying in time to the swift rhythm of the tune he was playing, Scott longed for a snap-shot of him.

The candles on the tree were burning out; but Jack piled the fire high with pine knots, and in a moment or so the room was full of light.

"Push back the tree," Joan said.

"Tak' yo' pardners," Tony called, when this had been done; and off the dancers went—Theo and Scott, Joan and Bob, Mr. Nicols and Margie.

The tutor's dancing days had long been over. They had never been many and it was with some inward hesitation that, seeing Margie's wistful eyes follow the others, he had requested the pleasure of a turn or two. He really enjoyed that dance, however, following one or two sug-

gestions from his small partner with the utmost cheerfulness, and Margie, conscious of having the tallest and oldest partner there, was far from critical.

Jack had to close his books to watch the fun, wishing with all his heart that he could join in it.

Joan swinging by, this time with Scott, caught the wish on her twin's face, and her own lost something of its gaiety. "I think," she said, "that I'm a little tired."

"You tired!" Scott exclaimed incredulously.

She nodded. "If you don't mind, I think I'll sit here by Jack awhile."

Theo came up, fanning herself with a palmetto leaf. "How about having supper—Nannie's got everything ready—we can heat the chocolate over the dining-room fire. It's getting pretty late for the children."

"It's a jolly supper," Bob announced; "I peeked into the dining-room, when I went in with Theo, so I know. There's chicken salad and beaten biscuits and cake and preserves and sandwiches and cold turkey and there's going to be chocolate and eggnog."

"That peek of yours would seem to have been a fairly comprehensive one," Jack remarked.

"It seems to me, that a simple supper—say crackers and milk—would be much better suited to one of your tender years and to Margie, as well."

Margie looked alarmed.

"Don't you worry," Bob whispered, consolingly, "he's just trying to joke. I don't think it's very much of a joke, myself."

It was a jolly supper. Later, before the children went to bed, Tony brought in the old silver punch-bowl, and Theo made the eggnog.

"We all always have eggnog on Christmas," Bob explained to Mr. Nicols and Scott, "it's a— a fam'ly custom of ours."

Theo filled the glasses with the white foamy mixture; and Jack rising, held his aloft. "To our mother—and all mothers!" he proposed.

And they drank the toast standing.

"Scott," Mr. Nicols said, as the boy followed him out to the porch, to say good-night, "you're a young fellow of much discernment. I take it, you're not thinking of moving on just yet?"

"Not yet," Scott repeated.

"Shall we begin lessons again to-morrow?"

"Give me until after New Year's," the boy urged.

In his own room he whistled softly to himself, as he lit his candles. Joan had offered a lamp, but he liked better the candles, in their tall old-fashioned sconces; they suited the character of the room. "Christmas almost over," he thought; what a pleasant day it had been—and how he had dreaded it.

"Mamma's awake now," Theo told Joan, as the latter came up-stairs. "And she wants to see her presents—and us. Will you tell Jack, while I get the children—they're not asleep, I heard them talking just now."

"To-night!" Joan said. "Mother, dear, aren't you being very imprudent?" she asked.

"You don't suppose I am going to settle down for the night without having seen my presents," Mrs. Clayton answered. "How did the tree look?"

"It looked like—this, only larger," and Jack appeared, bearing the smallest, most complete of Christmas trees, that ever bore half a dozen tiny lighted candles, and stood planted firmly in a small pasteboard box.

"Where did you get it?" Joan cried delightedly.

"What a perfect little beauty!" his mother

cried. "I surely did not expect to have a Christmas tree of my own this year."

'Cut it off of ours," Jack said. "I did it all by my lonesome, trimming I mean, last night while the others trimmed the big tree."

"And now for my presents," Mrs. Clayton said. "I think, first of all, I shall have to see that very mysterious looking parcel, labeled from Bob and Margie, about which Bob has been dropping the most exciting hints for some days."

Bob produced the stool promptly; he and Margie were in gala attire, warm red flannel dressing gowns over their night clothes, and warm red worsted bedroom slippers on their feet. The slippers, Nannie had knit them for their Christmas and they were almost as vividly red as the paint on Bob's footstool.

"And I'll show you how good and strong it is," Bob volunteered; as smiling benignly upon his mother, he sat down on the stool.

Slowly but surely those four legs of unequal length gravitated toward the centre, letting an exceedingly astonished small boy down to the floor.

However Bob, as might have been expected, rose cheerfully to the occasion. "I reckon I

didn't put enough nails in it," he observed, rising to his feet at the same time. "S'pose we look at the rest of your things now, mamma. You needn't mind 'bout this, I can fix it all right to-morrow, you wouldn't want to use it to-night, anyway."

"No, dear, not to-night," his mother assured him quite gravely.

One by one, she opened her other packages. They were simple gifts enough, but they represented a great deal of love and thought—a book or two, a new pair of soft gray slippers with pink bows, a white shoulder shawl, a couple of new down cushions, covered with pretty light-colored chintz.

"You-all can't think how rich I feel," the mother said, smiling at the little group gathered about her. "How did you guess so well just what I wanted?"

Bob picked up his particular offering, or rather Margie's and his. "I reckoned you'd be needing something like this now," he answered.

"We're all feeling pretty rich to-night," Joan said, bending to kiss her mother good-night; "but the dearest, best present of all—for us—is that you are so much better, mater mine."

CHAPTER VIII

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

"JACK," his twin faced him sternly, "you're worrying over something."

It was the Sunday afternoon after Christmas, and for the first time in what seemed to Joan a very long while, she and her twin had an idle hour to themselves.

"And you know," the girl had said, "that when one is fortunate enough to have a twin, one rather likes to be on something more than a speaking acquaintance with him."

Jack did not deny Joan's statement, though what it was that was troubling him, he seemed disinclined to explain. "Only," he said, stopping in their slow saunter about the garden, to break off a withered branch from a rose bush, "I don't suppose that there is any chance of Mr. Lawrence's coming back for some time."

"I saw Mrs. Lawrence yesterday ; it will be several months yet. You're getting on pretty well by yourself, aren't you ?"

"I dare say I haven't really fallen behind very much," Jack said gloomily.

"And you won't," Joan declared; "you're having more time for study, now that you have an assistant."

"Y-es, but it's kind of discouraging, pegging away by one's self."

"I wish I could come study with you, but these are such busy days."

"I wonder what makes Scott content to hang around down here?"

"You *might* say, 'to stop on at the Juniper Inn,'" Joan remonstrated.

"Bother the Juniper Inn!"

"It's not so very much bother."

"It hasn't been the past week—certainly," Jack remarked.

"We'll have more custom, when the holidays are over," Joan said hopefully. "Really, I think I like being a business woman."

"You've no business being a woman of any sort—at your age. Dear me, you ought to be playing ——"

"Please don't say 'with my dolls,'" Joan interrupted; "I don't believe I could forgive that."

"Well, you ought to be playing with, or at something instead of running taverns and growing old before your time."

"If you please, I'm not running taverns," Joan laughed, "and I haven't noticed any gray hairs yet, nor any immediate signs of age. Jack, what ails you this afternoon?"

"I'm cross," Jack admitted frankly.

"No you aren't—only worried—and I know what about—but it'll all come right, you'll be head of your class in college yet."

"Those youngsters have got to begin lessons again soon," Jack said, "they've been running wild too long. You and I were going to do a lot of reading together this winter, and we haven't done a bit."

"'The best laid schemes,'" Joan suggested.

Jack gave his shoulders an impatient twitch. "I vow I won't be philosophical this afternoon." He shifted his crutch wearily. "If only I were not such a helpless wretch, I might do something, instead of coming whining to you, with my troubles."

"Jack, don't!" Joan implored.

"Well, I won't—I think I'll go see mamma a while, you won't mind?"

Joan shook her head, but she was disappointed—disappointed and troubled about Jack. It wasn't like him to talk in this manner. Oh, dear, why should Scott have books and a tutor and unlimited opportunities for acquiring knowledge and care so little about them all, while —— Joan retired to her hammock to try and solve the problem, feeling that things were very hard to understand in this world. She felt almost discouraged herself—there had been so little custom the past week. Jack's college fund was growing so slowly. Still, and Joan's hopefulness reasserted itself, it was growing—and Jack was young yet—and best of all, mamma was getting better every day so that worry was removed.

Up-stairs, Jack had found Theo reading to Mrs. Clayton, and had promptly ousted her. "I want the mater all to myself for a while," he said.

"Theo needs fresh air," Mrs. Clayton said, "and it strikes me, Jack, that you look as if you needed me; I've seen very little of you lately."

"I've been busy." Jack threw himself on the lounge opposite his mother's chair.

"Busy! That's Joan's cry—I hear it nowadays even from Bob and Margie."

"The Hon. Robert takes himself very seriously," Jack parried, anxious to get off dangerous ground.

His mother leaned toward him, a gleam of laughter in her eyes. "It's my belief," she said, "that you young folks are one and all up to some sort of mischief. What, I haven't been able to make my mind to yet."

Jack tried to look the picture of injured innocence. "Now, if you were referring to the Hon. Robert and his small sister——"

"I am referring to all of you," his mother insisted laughingly. "I am not sure that I exempt Scott. That's a nice boy, Jack; he and I are getting to be very good friends. I quite look forward to his visits."

In spite of himself, Jack's face had changed at the mention of Scott. "Mater dear," he said slowly, leaning toward her, but with face averted, "I'm growing horribly envious and getting to indulge in all sorts of—detestable feelings. I pretty nearly broke Joan all up this afternoon and now I've come up here to worry you."

For a moment, Mrs. Clayton did not answer; but Jack felt that she understood—he had known that she would.

"He has so much—everything," he added.

"*Everything?*" Mrs. Clayton asked.

"And he values them so little," Jack went on.

"You are quite sure it is that?"

Jack looked up surprised.

"Or, isn't it, that there is something else—some trouble hard to bear—that far outweighs all those other things, which you *think* you envy him so much."

"But ——" Jack began.

"I think, dear," his mother said, "that if you knew all Scott's life—its shadows, as well as its blessings—you would not change with him."

"But mater, what do you know? Has he told you anything?"

"No, dear, not a thing, but there is something on his mind. I noticed it that first visit, Christmas Day; and the three or four times I have seen him since have confirmed the impression—the boy is in deep trouble about some one, I am sure."

"I don't believe he's done anything shady himself," Jack declared.

"Nor I," his mother answered.

"I wonder if Dr. Burley knows?"

I hardly think so, though he may. He likes

Scott and is sorry for him, and he is very glad that you-all took him in."

Jack looked thoughtful. "I reckon you're right, mater. Scott does seem mighty glum at times—but maybe the next moment he's as lively as anything. And he hardly ever speaks about his home or his people, but he's a good sort—lends me no end of books—if he'd only lend me his—tutor." Jack rose, with a little laugh. "Well, I'll try not to grumble and envy other people. I reckon I'd better go comfort Joan; I left her 'way in the depths, on my account. Possibly, you may have noticed, mater, that Joan is a brick."

"I suppose that is intended as a compliment," Mrs. Clayton said.

"Purely and simply." Jack stood a moment leaning on his crutch and looking down at his mother, something of the unsatisfied expression still on his face. "And the moral of it all is—I mean what we've been saying about our boarder—that I must make up my mind to be a good little boy, and be contented with my own back lot, because it might be worse."

"That's the moral," his mother laughed.

"I think I agree with Margie, that morals are

very tiresome. And you know, after all, it might be better."

"Might and will be," Mrs. Clayton said confidently.

"It's easy to see where that twin of mine gets her hopefulness from," Jack observed.

"And her perseverance from her father," his mother answered. "Joan is very like her father—and so are you, Jack."

"Am I?" the boy said, straightening himself involuntarily—very straight and tall his father had been. It had been Jack's pride as a little boy to note how nearly every one had to look up, when speaking to him. "Joan is like him," the boy said slowly, "looks like him, I mean, and carries herself as he used to. I," he moved on his crutch restlessly, "I—can never do that—I used to think no one walked as he did, so swift and sure."

"But you are like him—in other ways, dear," Mrs. Clayton said softly. "In the ways I love best to have you. And you can grow more so every day."

Jack made no reply for a few moments. He stood quite still looking out through the broad low window to the quiet garden, growing

shadowy now, as the sun sank behind the tall trees bordering it on the west; and slowly the boyish face lost its look of impatience and discouragement.

At last he turned with a smile, a smile very like his father's. "Thank you, mater," he said, "I reckon you're right—we'll win through yet."

Down-stairs, Jack found Joan engaged in telling stories to Bob and Margie. The moment he appeared, she pressed him into service. It was nearly tea time and she was chief cook to-night, Nannie having gone to spend the afternoon and evening with her married daughter.

Out in the kitchen, Joan comforted herself with the assurance that Jack wasn't looking nearly so unhappy as before he went up-stairs.

The kitchen fire was low and it did seem as if the kettle never would boil; Joan paced slowly up and down the room, humming softly to herself.

"Is this forbidden ground?"

Joan turned suddenly. Scott stood in the open doorway—he had been to town for the first time, since that day he and Joan had gone shopping together—he looked very eager about something.

"Do you like a kitchen?" Joan asked.

"When you are in it—and I have a favor to ask."

"About which you are evidently rather doubtful, else you wouldn't have been so careful to give the sweets first," Joan laughed.

"It is rather a big one. I want to study out here."

"*Here!* Really, I am afraid Nannie would seriously object."

Scott laughed. "You know what I mean—here, at the Juniper Inn."

"But I thought you did study every night, like a good boy. Have you been playing possum, like a bad one?"

"I mean have my regular lessons every day—have Nicols out here, instead of my going over to the hotel, and all that—and, most of all, I want to have Jack study with me, he's so clever. It'll be no end of a help to me. Besides, it's lots more fun having a fellow work with one. I came right to you, Miss Joan, because I thought you'd be able to manage it—and him. You will, won't you? We'll start in on Wednesday."

Joan gave a little gasp. "You—you take my breath away. You call that *asking* a favor?"

"Sure," Scott declared.

"When you are offering us the very thing Jack wants so much! Why, if we were to accept it, it would put us under everlasting ——"

Scott interrupted her. "Don't you mention any such thing as an obligation to me, Miss Joan. As if I wasn't fathoms deep in yours already!"

"Nonsense," Joan protested.

"A truce then," Scott said. "And it's Nicols' idea, really ——"

"Cross your heart on that?" Joan asked laughingly.

"Well, he agreed, almost before I'd the words out of my mouth, so I reckon he'd been thinking about it himself. He's taken a tremendous notion to Jack."

"Oh," Joan cried, "I can't take it in. I haven't any words big enough to express all I feel."

"One little word will do. It begins with *y*, ends with *s*, and has an *e* in the middle."

"Mamma must decide," Joan said. "You shall ask her to-morrow morning, yourself."

"Mayn't I make you my deputy, please?"

Joan shook her head.

"You would do it so much better than I."

"Oh, I would, would I?" Joan laughed. "That is one of the things that will never be determined in this world, my friend."

"You surely are what our Martha calls 'terrible sot,' when you want to be."

"Nannie calls it 'determinated.' She says it runs in the Clayton family. To-morrow morning then—we won't say a word to any one else until we see what mamma says."

"You are sure I won't trouble her."

"Perfectly."

"And you think she will say ——?"

"I hope she will say that 'one little word' which 'begins with *y*, ends with *s*, and has an *e* in the middle.'" The laugh in Joan's voice was not very steady, her brown eyes were very soft and deep, as they looked into Scott's gray ones. She held out a hand to him. "Whichever way mamma decides, thank you ever and ever so much. It was a fortunate chance for us, that brought you by the Juniper Inn that day."

"An' it please your Ladyship, it was not chance, but design." Scott took a note-book from his pocket and opening it handed a soiled crumpled scrap of paper to Joan.

She gave a quick exclamation of mingled amusement and astonishment. "Where did you get this thing?"

"I appropriated it from the wall of the waiting-room, down at the station."

"So *that* is where it went to. Jack drove 'way over to the station for the express purpose of capturing it."

"Glad I got there first."

"The Hon. Robert will be rejoiced to learn that his labors in our behalf were not all in vain. May I tear this up now?"

"No indeed—that is one of my favorite treasures," Scott held out his hand for the paper, reading aloud, with much unction, Bob's carefully printed announcement:

"The Juniper Inn

Once More Opens Its Doors to the Quality
Reasnable Rates

First Class Servis

Situashun Unexselled Come One Come All'"

"I cry for mercy!" Joan exclaimed; "isn't it simply awful?"

"Awful? Not a bit of it. You cannot imagine what a comfort it has been to me to

know that I am considered as belonging to the 'quality'—else how should I have found shelter at the Juniper Inn?"

It occurred to Joan just then that the kettle had been boiling for some time; and that possibly the others might be more than ready for their supper. She ran into the dining-room, to see if Tony had the table ready, Scott following her.

"You shall have your choice of jam to-night," Joan told him.

"Strawberry," he answered promptly.

"Strawberry, it shall be," Joan assured him.

"It seems to me," Bob remarked, as he strolled in, "that supper's late to-night."

"So it is," Joan admitted cheerfully—too cheerfully, Bob thought.

"Punct'al'ty is a most desir'ble trait in the young," he observed with grave severity.

"So it is," Joan admitted, quite as cheerfully as before. "See that you bear that in mind, my son. Supper'll be ready in just a moment."

"I'm ready now," the unsquelchable Bob said; "I'll go tell the others. Theo's getting mamma's tray ready. I wish mamma could come down to supper."

Out in the hall, Joan overtook her small

brother. "Bob," she said, stopping to give him a hearty hug, "you're a trump—I don't know what the Juniper Inn would've done without you."

"Neither do I," Bob answered quite soberly. "It was me that started it, wasn't it?—Me and Margie," he added loyally. In Margie's presence he frequently felt called upon to snub her a little, in her absence he never failed to uphold her dignity.

More than once, during supper that evening, Jack glanced wonderingly at his twin. Had anything good happened? Surely not, or she would have told him, first of all.

"How's Nicols?" Bob asked Scott.

"*Mister* Nicols, if you please, young man," Jack said sternly.

Bob smiled loftily. "Oh, Nicols and I fixed that all right. I said to him, 'S'pose you just call me Clayton and I call you Nicols, and not have any of that tiresome for-formal'ty,' and he said to me, 'All right, old fellow,' and I said to him ——"

"You'll be saying good-night to us, presently, if you don't hush up," Jack interposed.

"Do you-all reckon there'll be a lot of folks

here to-morrow?" Margie asked. "I like it better when people keep coming."

"So do I," Joan said.

"I suppose I ought to, too," Theo remarked, "but I don't."

"I don't see what 'special diff'rence it makes to you," Bob said. "You're up-stairs with mamma most of the time—'tain't like you had to really run the Juniper Inn—like we-all."

"Well, I like that!" Theo laughed.

"How soon will mamma be able to come down?" Jack asked.

"Dr. Burley doesn't say exactly. He says mamma is getting on finely and that she will be able to come down 'soon'; but it seems to me," Theo added wisely, "that a doctor's 'soon' is generally spelled l-o-n-g by other people."

As soon as she could, after supper, Joan ran up to pay her mother a little visit. Kneeling on the hearth-rug beside her mother's chair, Joan said softly, "Mamma, dear, if Jack could pass the exams, and win a scholarship in some college, it wouldn't cost so very much for him to go to college, would it?"

"Perhaps not the going—but the keeping him there, from our point of view, would come rather

heavy on us, I'm afraid. He might do something himself—coaching, or something like that. And I'll be well soon, now, and then we can begin to save in earnest. Of course it has been impossible to do that lately."

There were dancing lights in the eyes Joan kept turned so resolutely toward the fire.

"It has puzzled me a good deal lately," Mrs. Clayton said, "to understand how you have managed so well. This has been a long siege, but Theo declares you have neither run into debt nor drawn ahead, except a little, at first, and that has been made up again."

"Oh, we-all've—managed," Joan said.

"You are certainly a very wonderful set of young people. I think I shall have to see your account-book before long. It promises to be interesting."

"When Dr. Burley gives his permission—not a moment sooner," Joan answered. "Mamma, don't you think Jack'll make a fine lawyer, and won't he enjoy all the long hard getting-ready part? I know he will be the honor man of his class." She turned, at the sound of Jack's crutch. "Jack, I wonder what your first brief will be?"

Her twin sat down on a stool at one corner of

the fireplace. "My first brief —— How came you so far afield?"

"Oh, by a very straight road."

"And a mighty long one."

"Not so long, perhaps, as you think," Joan assured him gaily.

CHAPTER IX

SUPPER FOR TWO

"A WHOLE cup of butter, Nannie?"

"Yas'm, Miss Joan, and none o' your skimped cups nuther."

"And beat the eggs separately? There, I've got the whites and yolks separated beautifully. This is going to be a fine cake, Nannie."

Nannie nodded her turbaned head approvingly. "You taks to hit fairly well, consid'ring—but you ain't the bo'n cook de old madam wuz."

"All the more credit to you, Nannie, if I turn out well," Joan said diplomatically, as she beat her eggs vigorously.

"Miss Joan," Scott said, appearing just then at one of the wide open kitchen windows. "Ask me if I like a kitchen now," he laughed, as she came quickly toward him.

"I'd rather ask you—you *have* seen mamma, haven't you?"

Scott nodded. "That's what I came to tell you about. She was jolly nice and asked me to send Jack to her. He's up there now."

Joan drew a long breath. "I can't realize it," she said. "I don't believe Jack will either, just at first."

Scott looked at her wonderingly. "Are you so glad as all that? Why you look as if you had come into a fortune."

"I have."

"Jack, you mean—if it is a fortune."

"It is good fortune and what is good fortune to him, must be to me, mustn't it?" Joan asked simply.

"Looks like that," Scott agreed, with a smile. "And, Miss Joan," he added, "I would like to make arrangements for Nicols to get lunch here every day, or rather every school day. I shall stipulate for my Saturday holiday—I believe Jack could go on indefinitely without any holidays, but I'm not made of such stern stuff."

"Miss Joan," Nannie called, from the table where she was making bread, "is yo' aiming to mak' a cake, or is yo' aiming to converse with the young gemmleman? Becase if yo' aiming to mak' a cake, I reckon you've shore beat them whites long enuff; but if yo' only thinking 'bout conversing with the young gemmleman, why my kitchen ain't the properest place for hit."

Joan laughed. "Nannie believes in the one thing at a time method. Scott, I'm going to make you a little 'cup' cake all your own."

"And can I have it as soon as it's baked—or must I wait until supper time?" Scott asked.

"As soon as it's baked."

"Then I'll go straight off and leave you to the good work."

"Good-bye," Joan said, tossing him a piece of citron.

Joan went back to her baking with a light heart. "Sift the flour four times, Nannie? Now let's see—butter, sugar, flour, eggs, powder, flavoring, now the citron."

Joan worked briskly, not forgetting Scott's cake, or the children's. She was to do the baking, as well as the making, and so presently Nannie went away, leaving her in possession of the kitchen.

It was a glorious day, that last day of the old year. Through open door and windows, came the soft sweet-scented air; overhead the sky showed blue and cloudless; out in the garden, Bob and Margie were playing, their voices breaking pleasantly the drowsy quiet of the rambling old place. Where was Jack? Joan wondered. Oh,

but the old year was ending well for them—and the promise of the new!

With the taking of her last cake from the oven, Joan heard her twin calling her. She ran to the kitchen door. "Here I am," she called back, "I'm all alone. I've been making a cake in honor of ——"

"Of?" the gladness in Jack's face matched hers—so did the ring in his voice.

"What you have come to tell me," Joan said.

"You have seen mamma?"

"No—but I know."

"That I am to study regularly with Scott; that Mr. Nicols is to come out here every day?"

"Yes—I knew it last night—or rather, that Scott wanted you to."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"I couldn't until mamma had decided for or against the plan. I never had a secret from you before, so hard to keep."

"It's just too good to be true," Jack said slowly.

"So it is," Joan agreed.

"And really I don't quite see how it is to be managed. There are the children's lessons; they

must begin again now and that everlasting old clerkship."

"We'll manage some way about the clerk part; as for the children, couldn't they go to Miss Hallie's?"

Miss Hallie was an old friend of the family, who had recently opened a small private school not far from the inn.

"You know, she wants them ever so much, and her terms are reasonable," Joan went on. "Mrs. Lawrence says she really does teach the children quite a little—and it would do Bob and Margie good to be thrown more with other children."

"The Hon. Robert *ought* to go to public school, if it wasn't so far," Jack said. "We might try Miss Hallie's for a while—if mamma thinks best."

"Oh, I'm sure she will. We'll ask her after dinner. There's one difficulty removed, and you needn't worry; as I said, we'll manage about the clerk's part. Why, I'd rather take down that old sign than have you lose this chance."

"Cust'mers," Tony announced, coming down the path from the house. "Land sakes, Miss Joan, but hit's mighty good ter see some one

a-waiting in de 'long room' agin. We-all ain't had a cust'mer for three days."

The twins went indoors; Joan to interview Nannie, busy in the big pantry, Jack to his clerk's post.

He was sitting there, when Scott came through from the garden. Jack stood up, flushing a little. "I was coming to hunt you up, as soon as I could get off duty," he said; "I've seen the mater, old fellow—it's—it's no end good of you."

"Of you," Scott answered; "then I'll ride over this afternoon and tell Nicols. He's going to have the time of his life with you. I never have taken his old Romans very seriously—I think they've been dead long enough to have earned the right to be left respectfully alone."

There were two or three more calls that afternoon; the old year was not ending so badly in this respect, either.

At supper, Bob remarked nonchalantly, that he thought of beginning school on Wednesday morning. He was sort of tired of studying at home.

"Poor Miss Hallie," Theo laughed.

"But she ain't going to be as poor now," Margie observed. "Bob and I are both going—

that'll be two more for her school—and she told Mrs. Lawrence, that every one counted."

"The Hon. Robert ought to count for two," Jack said.

"I rather like Miss Hallie," Bob said, "and she's going to be mighty glad to see us."

"Then I reckon she'll be twice glad, when school is out," Jack said.

"Do you mean because there's two of us?" Margie asked.

"That wasn't precisely my meaning," Jack laughed.

New Year's Day, while it brought no regular customers, was a rather busy day at the Juniper Inn; various family friends, young and old, came out from town to offer their good wishes for the coming year. Among them, in the afternoon, came Dr. Burley and Mr. Nicols. The latter promptly disappeared into the garden with Jack, the doctor going up-stairs to see Mrs. Clayton.

There he learned all about this new plan of Scott's,—a plan he was quick to approve of; then he came down to join a gay group gathered about the fire (always welcome at night) in the "long room," and enjoyed some of Nannie's

coffee and pound cake—both made as only Nannie could make them.

Mr. Nicols had come indoors by that time and was having a very sociable chat with Margie, who, since the night of the tree, had counted him one of her small circle of friends.

Both the doctor and Mr. Nicols were invited most warmly to stay to the family supper, but both had previous engagements and presently drove off together.

“That’s a fine boy,” the tutor said, as they left the tavern.

“Which one?” the doctor asked. “I know of three back there—to any one of whom your adjective might be fairly applied—in my opinion.”

“So it might, sir,” Mr. Nicols answered; “I was referring to Jack, at the moment.”

“He is a fine boy. I’m glad to hear of the lift you are going to give him. He’s bound to win his way in the end, but he will need all the help he can get at the start—handicapped as he is.”

“Handicapped?” Mr. Nicols repeated.

“Yes, sir—at least, that’s what I call it—the poor fellow will be lame all his life; he can never go without his crutch.”

"On my word, doctor, I had forgotten all about that. Somehow, I never do seem to think of it; he does not force it upon one. Handicapped, well perhaps to some extent. But there are worse handicaps than his, doctor."

"I suppose so," the doctor said. "He starts fair in other respects. He has nothing to live down, or anything of that sort to contend against."

"Which is a good deal," Mr. Nicols said.

"You should have seen his father, sir; and *his* father, the old judge, before him—straight and tall, like all the Claytons. Jack comes of a fine race, sir—he is the first of his line, thanks to the carelessness of a little ignorant nurse maid, to be so marred. Fine and sound of mind and body—that's the heritage of a Clayton—it's mighty hard for me to see one of the best of them defrauded of any part of his." The doctor flicked his horse impatiently. "Up, Dolly, this is a nice way for you to begin your New Year—jogging along at a snail's pace."

On Wednesday morning began the new order of things at the old tavern. Theo took Bob and Margie to Miss Hallie's and precisely at quarter of ten, Mr. Nicols appeared and he and his two

pupils retired to the old ballroom, which had been decided upon as a schoolroom, for what was, to Jack at least, a most delightful three hours.

It had been intended that Mr. Nicols should lunch in solitary state in the "long room"; but when at one o'clock the three appeared, he gravitated so naturally to the back porch with the other two that, when presently Tony announced dinner, Theo hadn't the heart to sentence him to what Jack called "solitary confinement."

After dinner Mrs. Clayton sent for him; both to thank him for his kindness to Jack, and to have a little talk with him about Jack's studies.

Business had not been very brisk that day, but toward evening some appeared and Joan was busy in the pantry, when Jack came in search of her.⁵

"I'll be ready for you in one moment," Joan said; "these are what Tony calls 'walkers,' and only want a light lunch. Nannie has gone to lie down, she celebrated too much yesterday, so I'm chief of the commissariat department."

"Then I reckon I'll have to go clerk it. I came to have a talk. I've scarcely seen you to-day."

"We'll have a jolly confab, all by our lones, after supper."

"I'm afraid I'll have to study," Jack said ;
"Mr. Nicols is a scorcher."

"You—you've had a good time to-day, haven't you?" Joan asked a little wistfully, as he turned away.

Jack looked back, his face alight. "Well, I just think I have. I wish you could study with us, too, Joan."

It was what Joan had been hoping for. It was hard to let her twin go on without her—harder, to have him do it without a backward look. She smiled now quite cheerily. "So do I and if wishes were ——"

"Horses"—Jack laughed back—"we'd pack all these troublesome customers on them and send them galloping."

"Scott was a customer—and Mr. Nicols," Joan remonstrated, jealous for the upholding of her venture.

"What a girl you are for mere details!" and Jack made his escape before she could answer.

After supper, the older boys studied while Theo sewed and Joan put the children to bed. Then Joan went in to sit with her mother. She was tired, and a little down-hearted.

Day by day, January slipped away. The Ju-

niper Inn did a far from rushing business. For the townspeople the novelty was wearing off and it so happened that there were fewer travelers than usual along the old high road.

Every day, the little class of two met in the old ballroom. Joan, sitting with needlework or book on the back porch, cast many longing glances toward the low building ; sometimes, when the wind was right, the murmur of voices reached her through the open windows. Every day, Jack was leaving her further and further behind. They had gone through the public school in Brentwick together ; been graduated from it together the June before ; since then had studied together with more or less regularity until the day when Bob, hanging out the old sign, had opened up a new life of duties and cares for Joan. She was inexpressibly glad of the opportunity that had come to Jack, but it was hard to be left behind. " Only I suppose it would have had to come some time," she told herself. If Dr. Lawrence had not gone away Jack would have studied with him and very likely she would not have been able to keep up with him then at home, as she had planned.

She was seeing less of Scott too, in these days ;

he seemed to have developed a new and highly commendable zeal for study of late. He still avoided, though not quite as persistently as at first, going to town; and at times he was still very unhappy, Joan was convinced of that, and wondered again and again what his trouble could be. If he would only tell her mother, surely she would be able to help him, and often when he came down from one of his visits to Mrs. Clayton's room Joan would look toward him eagerly, hoping that perhaps this time he had told her.

She was thinking of him one evening, wondering where he was, when suddenly it occurred to her that for some time Bob and Margie had been equally conspicuous by their absence. They had come hurrying home from school, looking, as Joan remembered now, decidedly important about something, then they had disappeared. Chevalier was with them evidently, as he was nowhere about the place.

"Oh, Tony," Joan called, as he came up the garden path, "have you seen the children anywhere?"

Tony looked confused. "No'm, Miss Joan—leastways not for quite a spell—I reckon I'se gwine to see 'em 'fore long."

"What do you mean, Tony?"

"I—I reckon I don't mean much of enythin' Miss Joan."

"Joan," Jack called at that moment, from the front door, "will you look at this?"

Joan ran through the hall to the front. "Well, I never!" she exclaimed.

Up the road, walking very leisurely, clad all in their Sunday best, came Bob and Margie.

"Where?" Joan began, as they reached the door.

"What?" Jack began, at the same instant.

Bob smiled benignly. "This is the Juniper Inn, my dear?" he asked, addressing Joan.

Had her eyes been shut, Joan must have vowed the questioner to be the pleasant elderly gentleman, who had stopped the day before for dinner.

"This is the Juniper Inn," she answered, and in her surprise just escaped adding, "sir."

Bob nodded. "Ah, quite so" (that was Mr. Nicols now)—"well, my good girl" (that was the elderly lady who had stopped the other afternoon and wanted to leave some tracts) "my sister and I would like to get supper—as soon as possible, please; we have come quite a distance."

"Oh, you have, have you?" Jack remarked. "I reckon I'd best look into this presently."

Joan was staring in helpless laughter at the pair standing below in the road.

"Please don't laugh," Margie begged; but Bob's dignity, borrowed principally from Tony, was irresistible.

"A mer-ry dis-dis-po-sition is a most for-fort'-nate po-possession" (Nicols again), he observed.

Whereupon Joan collapsed into one of the porch chairs.

"You are the young clerk?" Bob turned to Jack. "Really, my dear" (this in a stage whisper to Margie), "a very clever looking young fellow."

"See here!" Jack exclaimed, "are we to have a continuous performance business of all the people that have stopped here?"

"Let them have their fun," Joan interposed. She got up. "This way to the dining-room, if you please. I will send the waiter to you."

Bob, in all the glory of best suit and his grandfather's big gold-headed cane; Margie equally resplendent, her large white felt hat enveloped in a big blue veil of Theo's, took their places at one of the tables overlooking the road, and when

Tony came for orders, Bob gave them quite gravely.

"Only," Margie caught at Tony's sleeve, "maybe you'd better not tell Nan—I mean the cook—that it's just Bob and me."

Bob frowned, bestowing a brotherly kick upon her under the shelter of the table-cloth.

"But," Margie explained, when Tony had gone, "if Nannie knew, she wouldn't stop to fry chicken just for us."

"Didn't I settle all that with Tony, beforehand?" Bob demanded, "and ain't we going to pay, just like we were real customers?"

"Do you s'pose that old gentleman 'll come?" Margie asked, changing the subject in quite grown-up fashion.

Bob looked out of the window. "He's coming now—sit still, Margie!"

Margie gave an excited little jump. "There; we've come and he's come, that's three this afternoon."

Out in the hall some one was speaking to Jack; then a tall old gentleman came into the "long room" glancing about him with quick friendly eyes.

At sight of the children, he bowed gravely

and going over to the fireplace, stood looking across at them, a humorous twinkle about the corners of his blue eyes.

"So here you are," he said, "ordered your supper?"

"Yes, sir," Bob answered.

"By the way, you said your name was ——"

"Robert Lawrence Clayton and this is Margaret Baird Clayton, that's Jack out in the hall—he's the clerk, you know; then there's Joan and Theo—Theo's the prettiest, but Joan's the most fun."

Tony appearing at that moment, with a tray, also an all embracing smile, Bob's confidences came to an end for the present.

Their new acquaintance and fellow-customer sat down at a table opposite and took out his newspaper; from behind which he watched with considerable amusement the comedy going on at the other table.

The afternoon had been cloudy, and by now the rain had come in a heavy downfall that threatened to last through the night.

Bob's pretended dismay and his wonder as to whether or not there was a livery connected with the inn, were very lifelike; and the pompous

manner in which he assured Tony that the meal had been excellent, and promised that should his sister and he happen by that way again they would not fail to stop in, equally so.

It was a proud moment for Bob, when he called for the bill, which Tony brought quite solemnly, accepting the nickel Bob left on the tray with his very best bow—the bow that he usually reserved for his occasional half-dollar tips.

“Ready, my dear?” Bob asked Margie.

Out in the hall Jack met them. “Would you kindly favor us, by registering?” he asked, opening the big book.

It took Bob some time to accomplish that task, but when with much labor and more ink he had at last succeeded in inscribing his own and Margie’s name in full the clerk of the Juniper Inn uttered but one word, short, but most effective, “Cut.”

And Bob, being wise for his day and generation, did “cut.”

It goes without saying, that Margie did the same.

They kept discreetly out of the way, until the family supper-time, when they reappeared, but with scanty appetites.

"Business pretty good, this afternoon?" Bob asked blandly.

"A gentleman and a couple of kids," Jack answered.

At which, two at the table sat in speechless indignation for fully five minutes.

Then Joan came to the rescue. "Did you enjoy your supper?" she asked, turning to the children.

"Y-es," Margie answered, more quick to forgive than Bob, besides she had a grievance to voice, "but the coffee didn't look like the kind Nannie gen'rally sends--seems like she must have known it was us, and we told Tony not to tell."

"I turned the coffee," Joan said.

"It was decidedly wrong of you to order coffee at all," Theo said.

"But I didn't order it." There were tears in Margie's eyes. "Bob, he did the ordering—and the talking—and the paying—and ev'rything—but I gave more'n half the money and," Margie swallowed a sob, "and it took all the forty cents I've been saving to buy things for my dolls' house—but Bob said bus'ness was falling off and that it was our abs'lute duty to 'courage home talent and I don't mind the money if it helps mamma,

but it wasn't half as much fun, as Bob said it would be—'cause he did it all—'cept the eating—and I don't like being kicked under the table," and Margie fled to end her woes in Theo's lap.

"Well," Bob said, "it's the man's place to 'tend to the bus'ness, 'spec'ally in public places. I s'posed she was having a good time—went way down to the crossroads—and my best shoes hurt like everything."

"Why in the world did you do that?" Theo asked.

"Well, we had to come from somewhere."

"Did you take Chevalier?" Joan asked; "he wasn't about the place."

"He wanted to come, but we sent him back, and he went off with Scott. We met that gentleman down the road, and he asked was there a hotel near—and I told him 'bout the inn and how we were on our way here to get supper."

"He's stopping for the night," Jack told Theo; "it couldn't be helped, it's a beastly night. His name is Porter,—John W. Porter."

"Porter?" Theo repeated thoughtfully.

"He's a very nice gentleman," Margie said, from Theo's lap. "Bob and I like him." She smiled at Bob, her brief defiance over.

Bob smiled back. "Next time you shall do the ord'ring."

"There isn't to be any next time," Jack said.

CHAPTER X

CONFESSION

WHEN Joan came down-stairs the next morning, she found Mr. Porter standing in the open doorway, but facing indoors rather than out.

Joan liked the way in which he bowed and said, "Good-morning." It reminded her of the courtesy that had always marked her father's manner toward any woman—young or old.

"This is a famous place," Mr. Porter said, looking about him. "I've a fancy for these old-time houses. But this is something like an old inn and the name, the Juniper Inn, carries one back to bygone times."

"The sign is old—more than a hundred years," Joan said.

They went out together to study the battered old sign board swinging back and forth in the fresh breeze. It was a bright clear day after the rain, and already the sunlight was shining through the trees.

"More than a hundred years," Mr. Porter re-

peated ; "but it has not been on duty all this time ? "

"No, sir," Joan answered, "it came down during the war, and only went up again a few weeks ago—for how long, remains to be seen."

"Swings back and forth with a right good will," the old gentleman said, and when Joan had left him and gone indoors again, he still stood there on the steps looking up at the old sign with interested eyes.

Just before breakfast, Bob appeared in the dining-room, fresh and shining as the morning itself from his cold bath and with a smile fairly outrivaling Tony's. "I am going to breakfast with my friend Porter," he announced complacently.

Joan busy about the table, turned quickly. "Who proposed it ? " she asked.

Bob looked indignant. "I wouldn't invite myself, would I ? " he asked. "I just said—and I didn't mean anything at all—that I wouldn't like to eat *my* breakfast all alone and he said, as quick as anything, that he didn't either and would I give him the honor of breakfasting with him and I said the honor was mine and he ——"

A large plump sofa cushion carefully aimed by Jack cut short Bob's further remarks with considerable abruptness.

"Maybe you think that's the proper way to treat a fellow," Bob began; but sofa cushion number two arriving about that time, he retired at once, with as much dignity as was possible under the circumstances to the society of his new friend, who possessed the additional charm of being unsupplied with cushions.

It was hard to forgive the haste with which Jack followed to ask Mr. Porter if he were quite sure Bob would not be in the way.

Mr. Porter's prompt declaration, that on the contrary he should enjoy his young friend's company exceedingly, was some comfort to Bob's perturbed spirits; and there was further balm in the glimpses he caught of Margie hovering wonderingly in the background. It would have been nice if she could have come too but it stood to reason, that now and then the men did like to be by themselves.

"But oh, me," Joan mourned, as she and the rest sat down to the family breakfast, "we never thought to warn the Hon. Robert against being too confidential. He's sure to go and tell all

about the hanging of the sign, and why we're trying to run a tavern, and everything."

"Sure," Jack agreed comfortingly.

"He won't tell him everything," Margie said, "'cause he told him a lot yesterday."

"Oh," Joan groaned, seconded by Theo.

Scott laughed heartily. He found Bob a never-ending delight.

Jack looked thoughtful. "I tell you what it is," he said presently, "we'll have to invest in some good firm bandages and see that the Hon. Robert always has one tied securely over that mouth of his before he takes his walks abroad."

"But," Margie protested, "he couldn't talk any then."

"Precisely," Jack said, "he couldn't talk any then."

Theo poured herself a second cup of coffee. "Mamma will be down to-morrow, perhaps. I reckon everything 'll go better then."

Joan pushed back her chair. "Yes, and that means a full and free confession this afternoon. It can't be put off a bit later."

"And possibly it means," Theo added, "taking down that dreadful sign."

"Oh, I hope not!" Joan cried.

Here, Bob appeared, in search of his school books. "My friend Porter," he began, standing well out of Jack's aim, "thinks of staying on a day or two. I 'sured him we-all would be very glad to have him, though I told him, as a rule, we-all didn't take reg'lar boarders."

"What else have you told him?" Jack inquired.

Bob glanced at the clock. "I reckon it's time I started for school—come along, Margie."

"Of course he can't stay," Theo said, as the children left the room. "You must tell him so at once, Jack."

"Pleasant little task," Jack objected. "What'll I say?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Theo answered; "and I'm afraid I don't very much care—as long as you get him to go."

But evidently Mr. Porter was a gentleman accustomed to doing very much as he liked and at present his liking seemed to tend toward staying on at the Juniper Inn. To Jack's explanation that they did not expect to do more than furnish meals for guests, and those only of a transient order, Mr. Porter calmly replied that then they must make an exception in his favor.

He had found his last night's accommodation very comfortable and had taken the fancy to stop on for a few days.

"And he's bigger than I am, you know," Jack told his sisters, with a whimsical smile; "so that force was quite out of the question on my part."

"What will mamma say?" Theo asked anxiously.

Joan pushed her hair back from her forehead, with her quick impatient gesture. "She's going to be so dreadfully surprised, that perhaps a little bit more or less won't count."

Jack gathered up his papers; already Scott was calling him to come. "You might at least set him to work, if he will stay. Let him play clerk—for the crowd. Anyhow, you and Theo will have to settle the ins and outs of this nice little muddle."

Joan ran after him. "It isn't the outs of the inn—but the ins who won't out," she protested.

"Mercy!" Jack implored, quickening his pace.

From the front porch came the steady tramp of feet—Mr. Porter taking his morning constitutional.

Joan busy in the "long room," felt that his very tread expressed a determination to die rather

than leave the Juniper Inn one moment sooner than he had planned. "I only hope," she said to Theo, who had come to hold consultation on various household matters, "that he hasn't planned to spend the rest of his days here. I just know that he is a near relation of that friend of yours—the one who came that first day, who threatened to send for her trunks and stay all winter. This gentleman wouldn't have just threatened to send; he'd have gone himself and got them."

"*My* friend!" Theo exclaimed scornfully. "How can you, Joan? And it's a serious matter. Who'll it be next? At this rate the family will soon have to be looking out for lodgings."

"Theo, dear," Joan smiled her sweetest, "don't you think that as the eldest, it is your place to explain matters to mamma?"

"No, decidedly not. That delightful task belongs entirely to the one chiefly responsible for the present state of affairs."

"But I am afraid Bob would muddle things up badly."

"Bob!"

"It was the Hon. Robert who hunted out the sign, and had it hung."

"It was the Hon. Robert's sister Joan who coaxed to have it left up. And she knows it."

"I reckon she does; and she won't be a bit sorry, if only her mother doesn't mind."

"If ——?" Theo repeated. "Dear me, here come a lot of tiresome people. Fancy, wanting lunch at this time of day!"

"Perhaps they want breakfast instead," Joan suggested.

It proved a busy morning after that and Joan found little time for thought. Nannie was cross, Tony unusually heedless.

"Keeping a tavern isn't all beer and skittles," Joan said, as she dropped wearily into her place at the dinner table.

"I'm afraid you've needed me," Jack said anxiously.

"Oh, Tony and I've managed; there wasn't very much that you could have done. Nannie's been about as easy to get on with as compressed lightning. I've been expecting a shock all the morning. Poor Tony received several, without expecting, or desiring, them. No, no meat please, nor vegetables. The superintending of half a dozen or more lunches and dinners seems to have the knack of taking away one's own appetite."

"Well, you'd better eat something," Theo insisted. "If mamma could see you now, she wouldn't need any further proof as to the desirability of having down that sign."

Which advice had, in some measure, the desired effect.

Joan was resting in her favorite place—the old hammock at one end of the back porch—after dinner, when Dr. Burley came down from his, by now, semi-weekly visit to Mrs. Clayton.

He surveyed Joan grimly. "Trying to work up a nice little case of nervous exhaustion on your own account?" he asked. "Should have thought one enough for one family myself, for a while, at any rate."

Joan promptly denied any such intention.

"Who's the elderly gentleman on the front porch?" the doctor asked. "Looks very much at home."

"He is," Joan sighed. "He's a boarder—our second—also self-invited. Dr. Burley, are all 'boarders' so determined, so immovable, once they've made their minds up?"

"So irremovable," Jack suggested. "Is the mater really coming down to-morrow, doctor?"

The doctor nodded. "See that you take good

care of her. Some one of you had better tell her about this highly reprehensible tavern business this afternoon."

"Joan is going to," Jack answered.

"I rather thought it would be Joan," the doctor said, as he turned away. "Mind you go about it carefully, young lady."

"Well," Joan said, getting out of the hammock, "I suppose I may as well get it over with. Do you think mamma will take it very hard, Jack?"

"I hope not," Jack answered, not very reassuringly, however. "If you like, Joan, I'll come too."

"Thanks ever so much, but I reckon I got you-all into this, so I'll play spokesman for the crowd; besides either you or I ought to be on hand down here—as Bob says, 'there's a rushing business to-day.'"

In her mother's room Joan found Theo. Theo rose most promptly as her sister entered.

"Oh, here you are, Joan," she said, with what Joan mentally characterized as a perfectly fiendish smile. "I know you've come up to have a good long talk with mamma, so I'll run away and leave you alone together."

"You don't seem in much hurry to begin that long talk, Joan," Mrs. Clayton said.

Theo had been gone some moments, and still Joan stood by the window, a half-perplexed, half-questioning look in her eyes.

She turned now, as her mother spoke, settling herself among the cushions of the low wide window seat. "I don't believe I know where to begin," she said, "there's so much to tell. By the way," she added, making the plunge, forgetting for the moment the doctor's reminder, "we—we all have another boarder—I don't think he means to stop long, though."

"Another boarder! Joan, what do you mean? One would think we were running a hotel!"

Like a flash, Joan seized her opportunity. "Mamma, dear, don't be vexed—but, that's a little like what we are doing. You can't think how strangely it all came about," and then Joan went on to make full and free confession, beginning with the morning when she had first heard the creaking of the old sign, ending at last with Mr. Porter's determination to stay on at the inn.

Mrs. Clayton, leaning back among her cushions,

listened in silence. "How long has this been going on?" she asked, when Joan had finished speaking.

"Since the fourth of December, mamma."

"And to-day is the first of February! More than eight weeks! Joan, it is utterly incomprehensible to me—how you children could ever have done this thing!"

"It seemed quite simple, mamma—at first." Looking back now over these eight weeks, she wondered herself at their daring.

For a moment Mrs. Clayton did not speak; she had grown very pale, and Joan watching her anxiously blamed herself for not going about the matter more gently. "Mamma, dear," she began.

"I should have known of this—long ago, Joan," her mother said, speaking very slowly.

"We told you the moment Dr. Burley gave us permission, mamma. He was quite unwilling you should know before."

"I cannot understand his allowing it to go on—even if you had won Theo over."

"It wasn't easy, mamma—winning Theo over, nor the doctor either, for that matter."

"It should have been impossible in both cases

—I knew you were impulsive to the point of rashness—but I did not think Theo —— ”

“Mother, dear, if you wouldn't mind it so much. We-all have been very, very careful, and the doctor has kept his eye on us. It hasn't been so bad—really it hasn't.”

Mrs. Clayton had turned her face toward the window, her eyes on the broad stretch of blue sky beyond. “I—I understand a good many things now,” she said; “Theo's silence about ways and means, the children's mysterious hints, Jack's pleas as to being busy—why you have looked tired so often, and grown suddenly older and wiser. I told Jack I knew there was some mischief afoot—I never dreamt it as bad as this.”

“But, mamma, dear, it hasn't been so bad,” Joan cried desperately; “at least, not for us—in the doing. It has been interesting at times, and amusing—and without it we shouldn't have had Scott here, and then Jack wouldn't be getting this great lift with his studies.”

“I know all that, dear, and perhaps, by and by, I may feel more reconciled—at present, I can only realize the fact that you children have been running a tavern !”

"Theo insists it is only a play-tavern, at best. We—we-all have been very fortunate. People have been most kind and friendly. There hasn't been any real trouble—just one or two—unpleasantnesses—nothing to worry about."

"Ah, but there might have been. You-all have been running a tremendous risk. I don't know what your father would say—his children running a tavern—with all that that involves."

"The gain has far outweighed the loss, truly, mamma."

Mrs. Clayton gave a little sigh. "You belong to the new South, Joan," she said, smoothing the girl's dark hair.

"You're not very much displeased with us, mamma? Truly you mustn't blame Theo and Jack very much—it was all my doing, really. Theo and Jack wouldn't have given in at all—only—only they thought we could get—there were so many things needed—that we couldn't see any way to get for you, mamma."

"I understand, my dear," Mrs. Clayton said, "and considering your motive, it would be rank ingratitude in me to be very severe with you-all. Suppose you call up your fellow-conspirators now.

I suppose it was because you are such an unscrupulous young wheedler that you were chosen to break the news."

And Joan ran very willingly to call the rest.

"Well?" Theo asked eagerly.

"It's my private opinion, publicly expressed," Joan returned, "that you have no right to ask whether it is well, or not. A pretty sister, you are!"

"But don't you think it might make her rather vain to be told so, so frankly?" Jack asked. "Does mamma want us all together?"

"We are to be sentenced in a bunch," Joan answered.

"Joan, where are my signs?" Bob demanded. "I can show them to mamma now, can't I?"

"That might be a good scheme," Jack declared; "they'll create a diversion, if anything will."

"What's 'crate a diversion'?" Margie asked.

"You wait and see for yourself, young woman," Jack told her.

Joan having produced the signs in question, Bob was allowed to head the procession, bearing them proudly in his arms. And the moment he reached his mother's room, he set to work ar-

ranging them about on various articles of furniture.

Surrounded by those glaring, red-lettered placards, Mrs. Clayton could only stare helplessly from one to another of them. At last she turned inquiringly to Jack. "Is he in the habit of springing this kind of a thing upon you-all?" she questioned, her voice trembling.

"The Hon. Robert has a most fertile mind," Jack answered; "fortunately, like lightning, he seldom strikes twice in the same spot."

"Aren't they pretty, mamma?" Margie urged; "Bob and I made them all ourselves."

Her mother waived that question. "Pick them up now, dear," she said. "I'll look at them again some other day."

Then she glanced slowly from one to another of the little group gathered about her, something of the old merriment in her eyes. "I wish," she said, "that I knew how best to scold and praise you all at the same time; I am too tired now to say much of anything to you, but I want you to understand that you have really done very wrong—but that I love and thank you all, more than I can tell, for doing it. Only, hereafter there are to be no more serious enterprises, nor

such important secrets from me. And now I think I will rest. Joan, dear, you look as if you needed fresh air."

"And the sign, mamma?" Theo asked.

"You'll let us keep it up, won't you, mamma?" Joan asked kissing her mother.

"I think we won't decide that matter to-night," Mrs. Clayton answered.

CHAPTER XI

ATTENTIONS

"THERE!" Jack coming up from the garden, came to a sudden halt at the foot of the veranda steps. "Now this is something like!"

On the veranda, in a big armchair, sat his mother.

"And really, you don't look so very invalidish, after all," the boy said delightedly.

"Indeed she doesn't," Joan agreed; she was sitting on the upper step, looking very contented.

"How should I," their mother protested; "after all the good care I have been having?"

"Might one inquire whether you have seen the sign?" Jack asked a little doubtfully.

"Indeed I have, and the 'long room.' I insisted upon making so much of a tour of inspection as soon as I was rested from the journey down-stairs."

"And ——" Jack's tone was expressive.

"I haven't made up my mind, yet," Mrs. Clay-

ton answered. "A little uncertainty will not do you young people any harm."

"At any rate," Joan observed, "we haven't had to take the sign down yet. And we have had two customers this morning," she added proudly.

"I think I shall have a little talk with the doctor this afternoon," Mrs. Clayton said; "he promised to look in to-day."

Joan's brown eyes danced. "About what time, do you know, mamma?"

"About five-o'clock, he thought."

At half-past four that afternoon, Joan came down-stairs dressed for a walk.

"Where are you going?" Jack asked, looking up from the clerk's table, where he was reading.

"I think I shall take a little walk. You can get on without me for a while, can't you?"

Into Jack's eyes came a sudden laughing gleam of suspicion. "And in what direction, if you please?"

"Oh, just toward town."

"I understand. Joan, your lack of principle, in some things, is ——"

Joan tried to look hurt—instead she had to laugh. "Well," she said, "I did think of going a

little way to meet the doctor. He likes all such little attentions—and he's been awfully good to us."

"Such a sense of gratitude in one so young is most refreshing."

Joan scorned reply, save to say good-bye as she turned away.

And a little later, Dr. Burley driving slowly along the old turnpike, drew in his horse sharply at sight of Joan waiting for him at the side of the road. "Good-afternoon," he said, "you're looking more chipper to-day, my lady. Is your mother down-stairs?"

"Yes, sir," Joan answered. "May I ride back with you, doctor? I want to talk to you."

"No, you don't," the doctor retorted, helping her in beside him; "what you want is to bamboozle a poor old fellow into advising your mother to let you go on with this inn business, which is making you old before your time."

"Please, Dr. Burley, that isn't the way I should put it."

"Of course it isn't, miss."

"But, please," she edged a little nearer, laying a hand on his, "we're getting on so well—it would seem a pity, wouldn't it, to stop just now?"

It means so much—every little bit we make—toward Jack's education. You see, now mamma is better, we're able to save more for that. For you know, doctor, sooner or later, Jack has simply got to have that education. And mamma needn't be troubled or bothered about it one bit more than if she were up-stairs."

"So you're calculating to go on indefinitely with this business?"

"There doesn't seem to be anything else at present that we can do; and it appears pretty positive that we've got to *do* something, if any of us are to *be* something."

"I don't like it, my girl!"

Joan laughed. "Neither do I," she admitted.

"You should be at your books."

"Now mamma is better, there'll be time for them too. I get an hour, now and then, as it is."

They had reached the inn, and as he helped her out of the gig, Joan said coaxingly, "So you will be good, won't you, doctor? And then you shall stay to supper, and have some of my waffles. And I assure you, sir, my waffles are worth staying for—even Nannie admits having seen worse."

"Hm!" Dr. Burley said, "it is to be hoped, miss, that you will never go into politics—with

these predilections of yours for wholesale bribery."

In the hall Jack met them. "Mamma has gone up to her room again, sir," he said to the doctor. "And how was your little attention appreciated?" he asked his twin, when the doctor had gone up-stairs.

"Quite in the spirit in which it was offered," Joan told him.

When the doctor came down again some time later, he found all the young folks gathered around the fire in the dining-room. As he entered six pairs of eyes met his with varying degrees of eagerness.

"Come right in, doctor," Bob said cordially, "it's right chilly to-night, ain't it?"

The doctor took the chair Jack offered, and looked about him with a smile. "This is something like," he said contentedly, "a nice lot of young people all together. I can't think," he added, taking Margie on his knee, "why one of you girls won't come keep house for me—surely you're not all needed here. Joan, why aren't you making those waffles? Don't you know it was hungry work convincing your mother (privately, I do not think she is at all convinced)

how desirable it is for you to keep on with this tavern affair. Personally, there is only one thing I would prefer having you do."

"And that——?" Jack asked.

"Would be—not to do it."

"You didn't tell mamma that!" Joan exclaimed.

"How do you know what I told her—or didn't tell her, my lady? All you need to think of at present is the making of those waffles. If you've got me here under false pretenses I'll ——"

"What?" Margie asked.

"Take that sign down with my own hands."

"There *are* going to be waffles," Margie said seriously; "I saw Joan making them. Nannie's baking the first set now."

"And Joan's waffles are pretty good," Bob remarked.

"Why don't you add—'for Joan'?" that sister asked.

Afterward, when the doctor had ridden off, vowing he should certainly kidnap Joan some day, and carry her off to his own home, where she should do nothing but make waffles for his especial benefit, Joan went up-stairs to interview her mother.

“Oh, you arrant wheedler!” Mrs. Clayton exclaimed. “With your little walks of attention—and intention.”

Strive as she might, Joan was not able to look greatly penitent. “You are not very unreconciled, are you, mamma?”

“Very—and always bear in mind, young lady, that your lease of the business is of exceedingly doubtful tenure.”

“For that matter—so is the business,” Joan rejoined laughingly, “has been all along.”

The next day was Sunday. Theo coming up after breakfast, to help her mother dress, announced that Mr. Porter had invited Bob to go to church with him. “And mamma,” Theo went on, as she brushed her mother’s hair, “you can’t think who Mr. Porter is? We-all only found out this morning; he was talking to Joan and me. He’s that cousin, Cousin Robert used to write about—the one who was brought up with him, and was abroad with him when he died and that wrote to us afterward.”

“John Waddington Porter!” Mrs. Clayton exclaimed in surprise.

“Yes, mamma—I thought the name sounded familiar when I first heard it.”

“John Waddington Porter,” Mrs. Clayton repeated thoughtfully; “Theo, he was Cousin Robert’s first cousin—on his mother’s side—so he is in some measure a connection of your father’s.”

“He’s ever so nice, mamma. He’s taken quite a notion to Bob. I suppose because Bob’s named after Cousin Robert. They must have been wonderfully good friends—Mr. Porter and Cousin Robert.”

“They were. He and Robert were about the same age.”

“He has never been here before?”

“No—we only knew him through Robert’s letters which were never very frequent, nor regular. They were abroad together for a good many years. Robert left him his property and the place. It was really quite as much the home of the one as the other. Your father had not seen his cousin since he was a boy. He was much younger than Robert.”

“Mr. Porter is a Virginian?” Theo asked.

“Yes—so was Cousin Robert. Theo ——”

“Yes, mamma?”

“Mr. Porter must dine with us to-day. Indeed, as long as he stays, it must be as our guest.”

"So I thought, mamma."

"It seems decidedly odd—his coming in this way."

"Why, you see, mamma, he came down to Brentwick on purpose to get acquainted with us. He says Cousin Robert wanted him to and he was on his way out here when he met the children, and Bob as usual got confidential—the Hon. Robert is always opening his heart to people, be they strangers or bosom friends—much to the regret of his family, and told him about the inn—so he thought he'd like to come here just at first as any ordinary stranger. To think how insistent we were that he should go away at once."

"Theo," Mrs. Clayton said thoughtfully, "I am afraid, from all I hear, that Bob has been pretty much in evidence of late."

"Perhaps so, mamma—it isn't very easy to keep the Hon. Robert in the background."

"This new way of living has not been exactly the one I should choose for Bob. He's a clever little fellow and has the making of a fine man in him—if he isn't spoiled in the making. He is as different from Jack, as day is from night."

“Mr. Porter thinks him a cute little chap—he told Joan and me so.”

“So he is, but cuteness allowed to run to excess degenerates into something very far from attractiveness. Bob needs, or will need later, a strong hand, I’m afraid.”

“Jack keeps him in check a whole lot. I wish you could hear him sometimes. There, mamma, you’re all right now. I don’t believe you can sit out though—it’s chilly to-day; Jack’s prophesying rain. Tony’s started a fire in the parlor—I don’t know when we-all’ve used that room—not since before you were sick.”

In the big parlor, opposite the “long room,” they found Scott reading by the fire.

“So you didn’t go to church,” Mrs. Clayton said. “Where are all the others?”

“Miss Joan’s busy, I believe,” Scott answered. “And Jack’s out in the garden. She sent him to gather some flowers; Margie’s with him.”

“Theo,” her mother asked, “you do not have people stopping here on Sundays, do you?”

“There haven’t been many, mamma—fortunately.”

“Don’t you want to see my notice, Mrs. Clayton?” Scott asked, taking the crumpled

scrap of paper from his pocket. "I tell you, I think a good deal of this bit of paper."

Mrs. Clayton read it with laughing eyes. "Oh, that Bob!" she exclaimed. "What shall we do with him?"

"Bob's a trump!" Scott insisted. "I'll never go back on the Hon. Robert."

"He will 'never desert Mr. Micawber,'" Joan announced, coming in, her hands full of roses. "See, mamma, what beauties. Scott, you-all can't go out in your garden and pick a handful like these, in February."

"I am afraid we can't. We haven't any garden," Scott answered.

"And you couldn't, if you had."

"Oh, yes I could."

"You could?"

"Certainly."

"At this time of the year?"

"Certainly."

Joan looked exceedingly doubtful.

"Because if I had a garden," Scott explained, "I should be extremely careful to have it some place where I could have roses at this time of year."

Whereupon Joan left the room.

Scott went too, after a few moments, to write some letters. So it happened that Mrs. Clayton was quite alone when, on his return from church, Theo brought Mr. Porter into the parlor to be introduced to her mother.

"Now this is a most unexpected pleasure," the gentleman said, as he sat down on the opposite side of the hearth; "I feared you were hardly able yet, madam, to meet strangers. Especially," and the kind eyes twinkled amusedly, "a stranger who had taken your home so by storm."

"I wish we had known before who it was we had with us," Mrs. Clayton said. "You should have met with a more hospitable welcome."

"Then I should have missed something that has amused and interested me very much. These are plucky children of yours, madam. I am glad to know how plucky."

"It is Joan who is really the plucky one," Theo said. "She is the originator of this present Juniper Inn. We-all have simply followed where she led, followed none too willingly, I am afraid."

"It takes pluck to follow," the gentleman said, with an old-fashioned bow toward Theo.

"It takes more, sir, to start on ahead by oneself and to make others agree to follow."

"Perhaps it does," Mr. Porter answered, "perhaps it does. At any rate, Miss Joan is to be congratulated on her venture."

"Still a rash venture when all's said," Mrs. Clayton remarked; "and one I should never have agreed to, had I been present at that consultation in the grove, that day."

"But youth is apt to be rash—that is one of its chief charms," Mr. Porter said. "I remember John himself was a little inclined that way."

"Joan is very like her father," Mrs. Clayton agreed; and then the conversation drifted off to family matters.

The next day it rained.

"A true prophet, you are, Jack," Joan said, coming down to breakfast.

"Mamma thinks it too wet for the children to go to school," Theo said, when she appeared.

Bob, who had found school rather pleasant than otherwise, looked somewhat at a loss. "What's a fellow going to do all day?" he asked, when breakfast was over.

"Improve your mind, young man," Jack suggested; "devote the morning to your books, and after dinner we'll have a jolly examination."

“Jolly!” Bob repeated, disgustedly. “I guess not!”

Later, when Jack and Scott had gone off to their studies in the ballroom, Bob proposed to Margie that they should pay a visit to Mr. Porter, who was reading his paper before the fire in the “long room.”

“Theo said we were not to go bothering people,” Margie felt in duty bound to object.

“Mr. Porter ain’t people—he’s sort of a relation of the fam’ly, besides being my partic’lar friend. And it’s only right some one should entertain him. He must find it ter’bly mo-mo-monot-onous here.”

Margie looked bewildered. “Please, Bob, if you wouldn’t use such large words—I don’t know what they mean ever so often and sometimes they almost frighten me—they sound so,” Margie’s voice sank a little—“so like swear words.”

“Gen’lemen don’t swear in the pres-presence of ladies,” Bob assured her patronizingly. “I find it im-imper’tive at times to use big words. Nannie says I ’herit the ten-den-cy from my Grandfather Clayton. She says, that when he liked he could use such ’normous words that there wasn’t any use trying to understand him.”

"I suppose," Margie said slowly, "that when he used them they sounded dif'rent; anyway," with perfectly unconscious sarcasm, "I hope so."

Bob moved impatiently. "Are you coming, or not?"

And Margie followed obediently.

Mr. Porter had taken quite a fancy to the "long room," with its quaint old-fashioned furniture; it seemed scarcely to belong to the twentieth century. And when no other guests were present he liked to sit there at one corner of its generous old fireplace.

He looked up with a smile, as the children came in. "Good-morning," he said; "rain kept you home?"

"Yes, sir," Bob answered.

"Take it pretty hard, eh—not being able to go to school?"

"I don't mind school," Bob answered.

"A bit glad, though, when Saturday comes around?"

"I *do* like Saturday," Bob agreed. "Stands to reason, sir, when a fellow's studied hard all the week, he needs some re-cre-ation."

Stronger even than her devotion to Bob, was

Margie's devotion to truth. "But, Bob, you don't study hard all the week," she protested. "Miss Hallie has to scold you lots for not paying proper 'tention."

At which Bob asked, rather abruptly, if Mr. Porter had seen the "treasure closet."

"The treasure closet!" Mr. Porter exclaimed. "Bless my soul, you don't mean to say you have one? Though, one might have expected it, in such a delightful old house."

"We-all only call it that 'cause we-all 'spect to find something there some day—not 'cause we-all ever have," Margie explained.

"Joan named it," Bob added. "She says she expects to find a fortune there some day." Standing on tiptoe on a chair, Bob managed to open the door of the cupboard at one side of the chimney-place.

Mr. Porter came to peer curiously into its dark recesses. "Looks just like a treasure closet, upon my word," he said. "So you've never found anything in it? That's too bad."

Unseen by the children, he slipped his hand into his pocket and then under pretext of seeing how far back the closet went, passed the hand into the latter. "Why," he announced, a mo-

ment later, "seems to me I see something there right now. Suppose you look?" and he held Margie up.

She leaned forward eagerly, her little face alight with interest; then she gave a cry of pleasure, and reaching in her hand drew out a pocket knife—a man's pocket knife.

Bob gave a long, low whistle. Neither pair of brown eyes showed the least hint of suspicion. "You are a lucky one!" Bob exclaimed.

"It's yours, sir," Margie said, as Mr. Porter set her down again and she held out the knife.

"Mine? Not a bit of it," Mr. Porter insisted.

"But it was you who really found it," she said gravely.

"I only said I thought I saw something there. No, my dear, it's yours all right. You found it in the cupboard."

Margie's eyes shone. "We-all *have* found something there at last! Bob, let's go tell mamma."

At the head of the stairs Bob halted. "I reckon that's a dreadfully sharp knife, Margie. I don't know's mamma will like you to keep it. After all 'tain't very suit'ble for a girl."

Margie's eyes opened wide. "Do you mean mamma will want me to give it back to Mr. Porter?" she asked. "He said I found it."

"What would you give it to *him* for?" Bob demanded impatiently. Sometimes he could not help feeling Margie a little obtuse.

In their mother's room, they found Theo and Joan. The knife was shown, and the story of its finding told.

"What can a little girl like you do with a knife like this?" Mrs. Clayton asked.

"That's just what I want to know," Bob remarked.

"She might give it to Jack," Joan suggested mischievously.

Bob fidgeted. "Jack's got a good knife."

The unmistakable longing in his voice was not to be withstood. Margie turned to him. "You may have it if you like," she said, a little note of regret in her own.

"Thanks, awfully," Bob answered with disappointing alacrity. "I'll make you a lot of things for your doll house," he added, opening and closing the different blades of the knife with all the pride of possession.

"That reminds me," Mrs. Clayton took her

purse from the table near her. "I understand that business has been sufficiently good the last day or so, to allow of our declaring a small dividend." She counted out seventy cents in change. "Suppose you and Bob divide this between you, Margie."

Margie's eyes opened wide. "Why," she said, "that's just as much as Bob and I paid the other night!"

"Is it, dear?" her mother said.

"Yes, mamma." Margie looked up, a sudden question in her eyes. "It—it isn't that same money, is it, mamma?"

"Why do you ask that, dear?" her mother asked.

Margie thought for a moment. "But that was two quarters and a dime and two nickels," she said slowly, "and this is all dimes and nickels."

"What'll you do with your share, Margie?" Joan asked, to change the subject.

"Buy furniture—parlor furniture."

"I'm going to get some paints," Bob announced. "Then I can paint the things I make you, Margie."

"What lots of nice things are happening to-

day," Margie said, dividing the change into two equal divisions.

"Come on down-stairs," Bob said, pocketing his thirty-five cents.

"Don't go into the 'long room' again, children," Mrs. Clayton said. "I am afraid you must have been troubling Mr. Porter, as it is."

"No, we haven't—not the least bit, mamma," Bob declared stoutly. "Mr. Porter was mighty glad to have us; he likes all such little 'tentations.'"

"It strikes me," Mrs. Clayton said, her eyes meeting Joan's, "that I have heard of something rather like that before."

"The Hon. Robert's remarks are frequently in the nature of quotations," Joan observed gravely.

"Bob," Margie asked, as they went down-stairs, "what's a div'dend?"

"Something you divide between a lot of people, I think," Bob answered vaguely.

"Cake and candy and such things aren't div'dends, are they—and people divide those?"

"Jim Bascom don't," Bob said; "he *is* a greedy."

"But Bob ——"

“Ask Jack—he will kn—— I mean I ain’t got time now to bother about such things. What’ll I make first, Margie?”

“A table—that’s easy. Bob, how much do you s’pose Joan’s and Theo’s was?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Bob answered. “What kind of a table?”

CHAPTER XII

ON THE SHORE ROAD

MR. PORTER stayed until the last of the week ; then he left to continue his Southern trip. "But I shall most certainly stop over at the Juniper Inn, on my way North," he assured his hostess, the evening before leaving the inn.

He had grown fond of the life there. The children interested him greatly. Though he had never married, still he had always kept a soft place in his heart for the young people. Especially, had he taken a strong liking to Joan—and this venture of hers amused him immensely. "I reckon you'll be running a whole series of big hotels, by the time you're a woman grown," he said one morning.

It had been an unusually busy morning, but at last the "long room" was free of occupants and Joan could take time to come out on the front veranda for a bit of a rest.

She laughed, fanning her hot cheeks with her handkerchief. "If you don't mind," she said,

"you might prophesy something better in the way of a future for me."

"Think what a lot of money you could make."

"But I don't want to just make money."

"Oh, you don't, eh?"

"You don't know how dreadfully lazy I'd love to be, if I could," Joan confessed.

"You lazy?" Mr. Porter asked.

She nodded laughingly. "Dreadfully lazy," she repeated.

"Then shall I prophesy nothing to do, some day, but lie in a hammock?"

"It certainly sounds more tempting than the other," Joan answered. "Still, I don't know as it would quite fill the bill."

"Well, what would?" Mr. Porter asked, with sudden seriousness.

And then, how she hardly knew, Joan was drawn on to tell him of that dream of hers. "You see," she said, with one of her quick upward glances, "Jack's bound to go to college—that's one reason why we went into this inn business, you know."

Mr. Porter nodded. "And it's paid, hasn't it?"

"On the whole, we-all think we've done fairly well."

"Pretty hard work, though?"

"Oh, we-all don't mind that, if we only win through."

"And this dream of yours?"

"Is to go to college, too."

"The higher education, eh?"

"Partly, but mostly it's because I want to keep up with Jack. I can't bear to think of his learning all sorts of interesting things, that I shan't know about."

"But you're a bit young for college."

"And a deal too ignorant—there would have to be a lot of getting ready first. However, I reckon I needn't begin to pack my trunk to-day." She laughed. "This family'll do pretty well if it puts its boys through college."

"Still you go on hoping?"

"Oh, I don't know's I'd call it *hoping*—just day-dreaming," Joan answered.

"Sometimes dreams come true."

"Day-dreams—impossible ones like mine?"
Joan looked doubtful.

"Even wilder ones. Anyhow, I'd go on

dreaming—it's not a bad antidote for innkeeping."

Joan smiled. "It's a very good one, I think."

The next day Mr. Porter went away.

"I like our new relative," Joan said to Theo, as they stood on the steps watching the old carryall down the road. Jack was driving their guest over to the depot.

"So do I," Theo agreed; "only I think we can hardly call him a relative."

"But we've got so few real ones and he's so nice and relatively."

As Joan often said, if they had a busy day it always seemed to be followed by an unusually dull one. "We-all 've reacted again," she said now, as she and Theo turned indoors. "I believe I can do a little gardening this morning."

Theo brought her embroidery out to the back porch, where Mrs. Clayton was sitting, and Joan, producing sunbonnet and gardening gloves, set to work.

She was still busy, when Tony gave the call for dinner. Very straight and pompous he looked, as he stood in the hall doorway. Tony never forgot the long line of grave and dignified butlers from which he had come.

Joan was laughing as she came up the steps. "Theo, that boy would turn a meal of mush and milk into a stately affair. Bless the scamp! To think of talent such as his being hidden away in this little out-of-the-way place."

"There's a deal more to Tony than talent," Theo answered, rolling up her work; "unless his capacity for mischief amounts to a talent in itself, which I'm inclined to think."

"I should call it genius. Where's mamma?"

"Lying down on the parlor lounge. Joan, that boy broke three cups this morning, trying to prove to Bob that he could throw them in the air, and catch them on the tip of his nose—like the juggler at the circus last year."

"But Tony's nose hasn't any tip," Joan said; "it's as flat as a joke without any point."

"Still," Theo protested, "Tony's nose—tipless, or not—isn't the point of this discussion."

"I don't very well see how it could be—do you?"

"Joan, don't be aggravating! Three cups today, about as many plates yesterday, and no one knows what to-morrow."

"Sauce dishes, perhaps," Joan suggested.

"Nannie says that if her eyes didn't convince

her otherwise, she'd vow the young heathen must be twins—that it's positively uncanny, one boy managing to do so much mischief. And that's not all, of course Bob had to show that he ——”

Here Joan interposed. “Please don't say—on the *tip of his nose!* Because it's about the best sample of a pure snub one could find on a day's journey.”

“Joan, you are ——”

“What?” Joan asked innocently, going to lay a little knot of violets at her mother's place. “And how many cups did Bob break?” she added.

“None, thanks to Nannie. Dear me, where can everybody be?”

“The boys are coming now, and Mr. Nicols. I'll go call mamma.”

Following the boys, appeared Bob and Margie.

More than once during the meal, Joan glanced anxiously toward Scott. He had been unusually silent and depressed for a day or two and to-day the look of misery in his eyes was almost more than Joan could stand.

It was some comfort to her to see that her mother had noticed it too. Mamma would find

a way to help him, if any one could. Joan, who found it exceedingly hard to keep anything from her mother, had told her one night, in one of their bedtime talks, of that little scene at the crossing. About her own half-formed doubts and fears, however, she had said nothing. And her mother, while not failing to divine them, had seemed anxious to let the matter drop. But the next day, she had had a talk with Dr. Burley.

Joan, who could not help guessing what it had been about, had been quick to see the grave look on her mother's face afterward.

Since then, there had been an almost indefinable change in Mrs. Clayton's manner toward Scott; and the boy must have felt the delicate, scarcely expressed sympathy, for he had grown very fond of that sunny end of the back veranda, which Bob called "mamma's parlor."

"Miss Joan?"

Joan started, as Scott spoke. "Yes?" she said. Oh, dear, had she been looking at, as hard as she had been thinking of, him—and had he noticed it?

"Don't you want a walk this afternoon—a good long walk?"

Joan looked as if she would like it very much. "Only," she began.

"It'll be jolly out on the Shore road," Scott said.

Joan drew a long breath. "Why I haven't been out on the Shore road—in ages."

"Then go this afternoon, dear," her mother said.

"Oh, we'll see that no one runs off with this precious inn of yours, while you're gone," Theo laughed, as Joan still hesitated.

"The trouble with you, Joan, is that you take your self-imposed obligations too seriously for your own comfort," Jack protested; "not too much so, I'll confess, for the comfort of other people."

"Is that a compliment, or ——?" his twin asked.

"It's a judicious mingling of compliment and —or."

Dinner over, Scott followed Joan out to the porch. "See here, Miss Joan, I've got an idea."

"May I be allowed to suggest that you ——"

"Cherish it? Miss Joan, I did expect something more original from you."

"Now we're quits," Joan laughed. "What is your idea, please?"

"You've got a wheel, haven't you?"

"Why, yes, but I haven't ridden it in ever so long. It was given to me, but somehow I've never cared to use it much—so long as Jack couldn't go too."

"But you *can* ride?"

"Oh, yes, but I'm always wishing it was a horse. Some day, when our ship comes in, Jack and I are going to have saddle horses. Then we'll ride!"

"Suppose I get out your wheel, and see if it needs any overhauling—and we'll have a spin this afternoon?"

"That would be nice. I'll go get ready right away," and Joan ran off.

She came back before long, looking very trig and fresh in her dark brown wheeling skirt and crisp pink shirt-waist.

Scott was waiting, and they were off directly, Mrs. Clayton and Theo waving them good-bye from the porch.

"And now for the Shore road!" Joan said, as they turned into the road.

"And a look out for that ship of yours," Scott answered.

"I'm afraid it hasn't been sighted yet," Joan laughed.

For a while, they rode on in silence. With the fresh air in her face, the swift movement, Joan was quite content not to talk.

"It is good— isn't it?" she said at last.

They had reached the outskirts of the town, and leaving the old turnpike they turned into a road running down to the shell drive, that skirted the shore for some miles.

Scott roused himself. "You ought to get out oftener; you've got a jolly color already."

"Smell the salt air," Joan said; "don't you love it?"

Scott nodded. "I don't see how people can bear to live back inland where they never can see the ocean. I had a great-grandfather who was a sea captain. I wish you could see his old home at Salem—it's no end interesting."

They had rounded the curve, and before them stretched the wide salt marshes. Beyond the marshes the blue water sparkled in the brilliant sunlight; further off still, lay green St. Simon's, one of the two islands locking Brentwick harbor, the lighthouse at one end of it standing out white and clear against a sky as radiantly blue as the quiet waters of the sound below. In the harbor, ships were riding at anchor, and here and there

they caught the glimpse of a white sail, the splash of oars.

With a quick movement, Joan dismounted. "Let's sit down and rest a while," she said, going over to the edge of the open grove of palmetto trees bordering the broad white road on the inner side.

They found a couple of flat stones and sat down, Joan leaning chin in hand, elbow on knee. "Oh, isn't it too wonderfully beautiful!" she said.

"You speak as if you had never seen it all before," Scott laughed.

"The marshes are always new—no matter how often one sees them," Joan answered.

"I've been out here rather often, myself," Scott said. "I guess you've got the right term for them. They are wonderful. I can't quite express it—but they make one feel—somehow——" He hesitated.

"I know," Joan said; and then slowly, more as if quoting to herself, she repeated:

" 'Oh, what is abroad in the marsh and the terminal sea?
Somehow my soul seems suddenly free
From the weighing of fate and the sad discussion of sin,
By the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes
of Glyn.' "

Scott turned quickly. "That's fine—please go on."

"'Ye marshes, how candid and simple and nothing withhold-
ing and free

Ye publish yourselves to the sky and offer yourselves to the
sea !

Tolerant plains, that suffer the sea and the rains and the sun,
Ye spread and span like the catholic man who hath mightily
won

God out of knowledge, and good out of infinite pain,
And sight out of blindness, and purity out of a stain.' "

For a moment, after Joan had finished, neither spoke ; then Scott said slowly, "That can't be all, Miss Joan—the fellow who wrote that wouldn't have stopped there."

"He had reached a very good stopping place, hadn't he ? But there is more. When we-all were little papa used to bring us out here on Sundays for a drive and always Jack and I would beg for our 'marsh verses,' as we called them, and papa would stop the horse about where we are sitting now, while he repeated them for us—and one week Jack proposed that he and I should learn them ourselves, and surprise papa on Sunday. It wasn't very easy ; there are several verses and we were only ten then. Papa was so pleased. Of course we couldn't under-

stand them, but we liked the rhythm and the sweep of the words—and then looking out over the marshes while we said them gave them reality.”

“ Yes,” Scott assented.

Then he and Joan sat quite still looking out over the green marshes, Joan with dreamy far-away eyes—Scott’s restless, impatient.

At last, Scott drew a long breath. “ ‘ Good out of infinite pain,’ ” he repeated wearily. “ Miss Joan,” he added, a moment later, keeping his face turned from her, “ there’s something—something I—I’ve got to tell you—I can’t go on in this way any longer—though perhaps when you do know you won’t—won’t want anything more to do with a fellow whose father is in —— ” he stopped abruptly.

Joan had not moved or spoken, but he heard the quick indrawing of her breath.

“ My name isn’t really Scott Newton,” the boy went on hurriedly, “ at least, not yet.”

“ But,” Joan began, “ I thought—you said —— ”

“ I know I told you—but—Miss Joan, how would you like it to have a father in State’s prison ? ”

“ Oh ! ” Joan cried.

"In State's prison," Scott repeated.

"Oh!" Joan cried again. "How can you bear it! Your father in—I can't say it—I can't believe it. There must have been some horrible mistake."

"Sometimes I have hard work to make it real, myself," Scott answered, staring out over the marshes. "State's prison—for forgery. It means a good deal to a—Monroe—to have to say that." The boy's voice trembled a little.

"Oh, there must have been some awful mistake—somewhere," Joan repeated.

"So my mother insists—and my sister Helen. They—believe in him."

Joan turned quickly. "And you do not! How dreadful!"

"I—I can't—I did at first—but the—the evidence——"

"The evidence!" Joan exclaimed. "As if that could make any difference—in such a case."

Scott flushed. "You are like Helen. She says she knows he—my father—never did it—that he never could do anything dishonorable—much less commit such a—crime. And that nothing will ever make her change her mind.

That is the way my mother feels about it, too, I know, though she never speaks of it."

"And they are both right," Joan declared. "I know they are."

"Perhaps so," Scott said drearily; "sometimes—I almost think so, too, and then—I've never known my father very well. He used to seem to me to be always busy with his books, but I was ever so proud of him. After he—went away—my godfather offered to adopt me, he hasn't any children of his own. He gave me six months to decide in—I am to take his name."

"And you have decided?" Joan asked.

"What else can I do? I have a right to at least start fair."

"You—you couldn't do it, if you believed—in your father. You couldn't hurt—him so."

"No," Scott answered; "but you see, I don't believe in him."

"And your mother," Joan ventured hesitatingly, "what will she—what does she think about it?"

"She thinks as you do, but—oh, I've threshed it all out again and again with myself. What else can I do? I must start fair!"

Scott sprang up, offering his hand to Joan.

"Shall we go on now? I'm afraid I ought not to've bothered you with all this, Miss Joan."

"If only I could help you in any way. If you would tell mamma?"

"I—I can't speak of it to any one else. You may tell her, and if she thinks best—the rest."

As they started slowly on the homeward ride, Scott said suddenly, "You must have thought it very odd, Miss Joan—my saying my name was Newton—while my mother signed herself Monroe."

There had been an interchange of letters between Scott's mother and his young hostesses at the inn, following the notes written at Christmas time, thanking Mrs. Monroe for her gifts.

"Yes," Joan admitted, "we-all did think it odd, and then Theo suggested that perhaps ——" she stopped, rather confused.

"Perhaps?" Scott repeated questioningly.

"I'm afraid you won't like to hear it."

"Please go on."

"That perhaps your father was—dead—and that your mother had—married again; and that maybe that was the reason you didn't—want to go home."

"I see. Really, it was a very plausible theory,

Miss Joan. You all have been mighty good about taking me on trust. You see what a risk you've been running—now?"

"Don't talk like that!" Joan cried. "And please don't think that we-all are in the habit of discussing your affairs."

The rest of the ride was a silent one. Both were busy with their thoughts; only just as they came in sight of the inn, Scott said hurriedly, "You won't let this—make any difference in our friendship then, Miss Joan?"

"*Joan*," the girl said. "Any difference?" she repeated. "Why should it—except to make us better friends."

The moment she reached home, Joan went in search of her mother, finding her, to her great relief, in her own room—and alone.

"Why, Joan!" she cried, catching sight of the girl's face.

Joan threw herself down, hiding her face in her mother's lap. "Oh, it's all I was afraid of, mamma," she sobbed—"and a great deal worse."

And then by degrees she told her story—a story very hard to tell.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DAY AFTER

"JOAN," Jack said decidedly, "you've got something on your mind, and you might as well out with it first as last."

It was after breakfast the next morning, and he had followed her to the garden, where she had gone under pretext of gathering the flowers for the day.

But the face which bent over the roses was pale and anxious enough to quite justify Jack's words—had been so all during breakfast, though its owner had tried bravely to look and act as usual.

"Out with it," Jack repeated insistently.

Joan seemed absorbed in trying to get an obstinate thorn from her thumb. "What a discerning young man it is," she said, without looking up.

"I'll take that thorn out."

Joan held out her hand obediently.

It was an exceedingly small thorn, hardly worth noticing. Jack held it out on the little blade of his pen-knife. "There!" he said.

"Keep it if you like—as a little souvenir of ——"

"A most aggravating girl!"

"If you're going to call names, I'll go in the house."

"No you won't—not yet. Joan, your thumb's all right. Suppose you look at me."

"Also, what a vain young man it is," Joan said, seemingly addressing the roses.

"Joan, I've only five minutes!"

"Then don't waste them calling me names and being ——"

"Joan!"

"Your Honor?"

For a moment Jack was tempted to give up the effort; but he knew every shade of feeling of his twin's face, and he was positive something very real was troubling her.

"Jack," suddenly Joan came quite close to him, "there—there is something, but it isn't my trouble and—I can't tell it to you. Mamma knows—she thinks it would perhaps be better not to or at least to wait a while—and see. You won't feel hurt? You know I'd tell it to you in a moment, if I'd only myself to think of. It's all the harder—that I can't tell you."

"Is it anything to do with Scott? I know it is. You've not been yourself, since you came home from that ride yesterday. I don't see why he need go bothering you with his woes."

"Woes—oh, Jack, if you only knew!"

"I mean it. You've enough worries of your own. I thought he had more grit."

"Jack, please don't ——"

"And look here—yesterday when he spoke to you, it was 'Miss' Joan; to-day it's Joan this and Joan that ——"

"I know," Joan said, "I told him he might."

"Why?"

"Because—I couldn't help it. I felt so sorry for him."

"Did it make him feel any better?"

"Jack, dear, what ails you?"

Jack gave a little laugh. "I reckon that Scott needs reminding that you are my special property."

"And now what a jealous young man it is," Joan exclaimed in surprise.

"I—I'm not; it's only—well, maybe I am—a little —— However, I suppose if he shares his tutor with me, I'll have to share my sister with him."

"And the tutor and the sister are to have no voice in the matter?" Joan asked.

"It strikes me that the sister, for one, took first choice."

"Jack, really, you're behaving very badly!"

"Well, I thought you liked variety. See here, Joan—there isn't any reason why Scott shouldn't—he hasn't——?"

"Certainly not," Joan interposed indignantly.

"I only wanted to be sure——"

"I told you mamma knew—there he comes now, and he will think we're talking about him," Joan turned to gather up her flowers.

"So we are," Jack answered.

"He will think I have rushed and told you everything."

"While instead you haven't told me—anything," and Jack, too, turned away.

"Oh, Jack," Joan followed him instantly, "I didn't mean to hurt you. If you wouldn't act as if I wanted to have secrets from you!"

"I'm a beast this morning," Jack admitted. "I'll be all right after a while. Don't you worry." He gave his twin's shoulder a pat, as he moved off toward the schoolroom.

It was impossible for him to meet Scott the

same as usual. He tried to appear merely absorbed in his studies, but Scott, sensitive to any change in the manner of those about him, was quick to note the difference.

Naturally he decided that Joan must have told her twin. And no matter how Joan might view the subject, it was evident that her twin did not care to have more to do than he could help with a fellow—whose father was in ——

If Jack could only have known the thought in Scott's mind! As it was, he was honestly ashamed of himself for not being able to throw off this new humiliating feeling of jealousy.

But it was the first time anything, or anybody, had come between him and Joan. It had never occurred to him that she could have any sympathies or interests in which he did not have equal share.

So two very silent, miserable boys sat side by side in the old ballroom, where they had passed so many pleasant mornings together. Mr. Nicols noticed the constraint between them, and set it down to some boyish quarrel.

Dinner that day was not the gay, pleasant affair that meals generally were at the Juniper Inn. Three, at least, of the party gathered about the

table were far from cheerful, though of the three Joan made the bravest attempt to appear so.

"I really don't know what's the matter with we-all," Bob declared; "we—we're not having a bit of a good time; and when a fellow's been working hard all the morning he likes things pleasant and lively at dinner. Cheerfulness is"—Bob glanced about him benevolently—"is a great aid to di-diges'ion."

So at least the meal ended in a laugh; Mr. Nicols leading in the one over this perfect reproduction of one of his own favorite observations.

As soon as she could, after dinner, Joan went in search of Scott; but he was nowhere about the place.

"Why, he went off up the road," Bob explained, in answer to a question from Joan. "I guess he's gone for a walk; Chevalier went too."

Joan went indoors again feeling very heavy-hearted.

"Joan," Theo said, meeting her in the hall, "what is the matter? You look as if you'd all the woes of the world on your shoulders, Jack looks as if he'd lost his last friend, while Scott——"

"Theo," Jack called from the foot of the stairs, "mamma wants you and me up-stairs for something."

Involuntarily Scott's steps had turned in the direction of the ride yesterday. He walked steadily on, with shoulders squared, Chevalier darting joyously on ahead, with every few moments a sudden backward run to his companion.

The day which had been bright, though less so than yesterday, was changing and by the time Scott reached the Shore road had grown damp and foggy. He sat down to rest and think in the same place where he and Joan had talked the day before. Before him, the marshes lay gray and mysterious, there was no glint of laughing water. St. Simon's was scarcely to be seen. Here and there, through the gathering mist Scott caught the rough outline of a vessel. It was all like one of the Dutch paintings in the drawing-room at home.

With the thought of home, Scott's heart gave a great homesick leap. Suppose he were to start North to-night? After all, why should he go on dallying down here? He had quite made up his mind. He wished now he had not yielded to the impulse to tell Joan. It had served noth-

ing, and inevitably it must affect the old pleasant life at the inn. Why, it had done so already—not that Joan herself had really altered, or would do so—Scott felt convinced of that. It was only that she was so terribly shocked and—and sorry for him, that made her so quiet and upset to-day. But Jack! He had not thought he would act so. But somehow, after all, he had had to tell Joan. Must he go on all his life—telling—spoiling everything?

“Chevalier,” the boy said, turning to the dog sitting grave and upright beside him, “Chevalier, do you ever find your life difficult?”

Chevalier wagged his plummy tail and looked very wise.

“I guess you haven’t run up against any very bad stumps yet,” Scott said. “Shall we go on now, old fellow, go on to town, and tell Nicols it’s about time to pull up stakes? It’ll look a bit like running away, I know—but I rather think one of this present company will have to do a good deal of running away in the course of his life—so perhaps he might as well get used to it.”

Scott got up, walking slowly in the direction of the town; at the last curve in the road, he

turned for another look out over the gray marshes.

“ ‘ Good out of infinite pain.’ ”

How the line haunted him ; and always following it, with seeming inconsequence, Joan's words—“ You could not do it, if you believed—you couldn't hurt him so.”

And then suddenly the boy started. Was it not the very fact, that deep down in his heart, he really *did believe* in his father that had made his decision so hard, had made still harder the taking of the final step. Even after, as he told himself, the decision had been made, had not the struggle been going on between his better nature and this other self—this sore ashamed self, seeking only some escape from a name dishonored in the eyes of the world ?

Standing there motionless, looking out over those gray marshes, whose wide expanse seemed to defy everything false and mean, the boy faced this truth. Faced, too, the knowledge that though honestly at last admitting to himself the real cause of the struggle going on within him, the struggle itself was by no means over. He might face the truth, here alone on this quiet

marsh road—but the courage was lacking yet to turn his back on this way of escape.

“And until I make my mind up, beyond thought of changing, which it is to be—man or coward—I can’t go home,” he said at last; “so Chevalier, my boy, we won’t go on to town, but’ll turn back the way we came.”

They were nearly home, when Chevalier giving a sharp bark of pleasure, darted ahead. Looking up, Scott saw Jack coming to meet him.

“You have taken a tramp,” Jack exclaimed, as he and Scott met. “I’ve been watching out for you for the last hour or so. Look here, old fellow, you must think me all sorts of a cad—but I didn’t have any idea—until this afternoon, about—what you told Joan yesterday. I only knew that you had been telling her something—that she didn’t feel at liberty to speak of even to me—and some plagued little demon put it into my head to feel jealous. Oh, not of the thing itself—don’t imagine me quite so childish as all that—but it was the thought of her having any really serious secret from me. I didn’t know I could feel and act so mean—but, you see, Joan’s my twin and we’ve always been rather more chummy than most. The mater saw how things

were, so she told Theo and me about—your trouble. I've been feeling like kicking myself ever since. I don't know whether you care to shake hands—but I'm abominably ashamed of myself—and sorry for you."

"Maybe," Scott said, when he had proved how very willing and glad he was to shake hands and be friends again, "maybe I ought not to have bothered Joan with my troubles, but I just had to tell some one. I couldn't go on sailing under false colors a day longer and somehow it seemed easier to tell--Joan."

Jack nodded comprehendingly. "Yes," he said, "it is easier to tell Joan things than any one else I know, except the mater."

They walked on to the inn together, not saying much more, but both decidedly lighter-hearted over this clearing up of the day's misunderstandings.

In his own room, Scott found the candles lit and a fire burning on the hearth. Unconsciously, the cheerful warmth and friendliness of the room comforted him, adding itself to the deeper comfort of knowing that Jack had not failed him really—that he had misjudged him. He could quite forgive Jack's self-acknowledged jealousy

If Joan were his sister—and chum—he wouldn't want any outsider coming in between them.

It was quite a different Scott who came out presently to the dining-room. The room was in shadow, and at first glance he thought it empty ; then he saw that Mrs. Clayton was sitting in her big chair at the further side of the broad fireplace.

"Come in, Scott," she said. "I am all alone, keeping blind-man's holiday. Where have you been all the afternoon. We began to be afraid you had run off and left us all."

"I wouldn't do that," Scott answered, coming to stand on the opposite side of the hearth ; "I don't believe there is any present danger of my even walking off very far—unless you send me."

"And *we* wouldn't do that," Mrs. Clayton said, smiling up at him.

He turned toward her suddenly. "No one knows—no one can ever know—what it has been to me—the being here with you all !"

"I *do* know, better than you think," Mrs. Clayton said softly ; "because, you see, I have boys of my own."

"It's been everything to me," Scott said slowly.

"Scott," Mrs. Clayton said, "I want to tell you how sorry I am—we-all are—for you; and how brave I think you have been."

"Brave!" the boy repeated. "No—not that. You do not know what a real coward I am—what it is that I am going to do."

"Yes, Joan told me all. But the cause is not quite lost yet, is it?"

"Nor won," the boy answered.

CHAPTER XIV

CO-ED

"BUT, mamma," Joan said that evening, coming to tell her mother a last good-night.

"Yes, dear?" Mrs. Clayton said, as Joan hesitated.

"Didn't you know, before I told you, about Scott? Didn't Dr. Burley tell you—something?"

"Yes, dear, something—that Mr. Monroe was in prison, and that a great many of his friends firmly believed that he was entirely innocent of the crime for which he had been convicted. He didn't give me any details. I don't know that he knew them himself."

"And you said nothing to us."

"No, dear—I thought it best not to. I am sorry, on some accounts that Scott told you; still, perhaps it is just as well. I believe it will be better for him."

"It's too dreadful!" Joan said; "I don't see how he bears it—Scott, I mean. It doesn't seem

to me as if I could ever think of anything else when he is around."

"Then you will be very little help to him, Joan."

"Oh, I shan't speak of it, mamma—unless, he does—and I hope he won't."

"I don't think he will, now that he has told you, and knows that we know. But, dear, he will be quick to see what you are thinking of. You must try, we all must, to forget it and to act just the same, if we are to be of any real help to him. Don't allow yourself to dwell on the matter at all, when you are alone, nor at any time."

"Well, I'll try," Joan said slowly. "Oh, dear, what lots of trouble there is in the world."

"I thought you were never coming," Theo said, when at last Joan made her appearance in their own room. Theo was braiding her hair for the night, and she did not turn round as her sister came in. "What in the world have you been talking about?"

"Scott."

"I thought so."

"Theo, how does he stand it?"

"Has to," Theo answered, tying a bit of cord

round the end of her heavy dark braid. "It certainly is awful."

"Mamma says we-all must try not to think of it."

"How beautifully you are acting upon her suggestion," Theo laughed.

"It's so hard not to."

"It'll be a great deal harder—for that poor boy—if we-all go round with long faces and never once let him forget it. He has forgotten it sometimes, since he's been here, thanks to our not knowing, and it's been the saving of him, I believe."

"Theo, you're not half a goose."

"I'm not half as romantic as you are, my dear; but—I've a deal more common sense."

"I really think you have," Joan admitted, beginning slowly on her own hair.

"Please, Joan, can't you move a little faster?"

"Theo, what do you suppose his sister Helen is like?"

"I haven't the least idea," Theo's voice sounded sleepy.

"Rather fair, I imagine. That is, if she is like Scott. Wouldn't you like to see her, Theo?"

"I'd a great deal rather see you come to bed," Theo answered.

Joan laughed and blew out the light.

By degrees that new feeling of constraint wore off. As Mrs. Clayton had implied, Scott was really happier, now that he had told his trouble.

And although, after the first there was no reference made to it, it was impossible for him not to recognize the real sympathy felt for him.

Life at the inn ran on more smoothly, now that Mrs. Clayton was able to come down-stairs; for although she was jealously guarded from any part in what Joan called their public side of life, she could and did do much toward easing the burden of responsibility the young people had been bearing so long.

One stringent stipulation she had made. If she consented to let the old sign remain up, Joan must promise to give some time each day to her studies.

So one morning Joan brought her books out to the back porch where her mother and Theo were sitting. "I'm glad you didn't insist on a regular time every day, mamma," she laughed. "Yesterday it was after dinner, the day before just

before supper and to-day, it looks as if I might get a little time right now. The only regular time I can count on is in the evening."

"And then you are quite too tired for study," Mrs. Clayton said.

"Indeed she is," Theo agreed.

"Theo, you and mamma think too entirely alike about a certain subject to be good companions for each other. I'll warrant it, you two have been talking heresy."

"I thought you were going to study?" Theo answered.

"I am studying—human nature just now."

"You'd much better give your time to your Latin grammar."

Joan opened the book referred to with a little sigh. "Jack is so far ahead, I'll never be able to catch up—especially by myself."

"It would have had to come some time, anyway," Theo said.

"Why 'anyway'?" Joan asked.

"You couldn't have kept up with him always."

"Why not—under some conditions?"

"Why not? Because Jack is going to college—or, at least, we hope he is going."

"Yes?"

"And you will stay on here at home."

"Yes—I suppose I shall have to."

"Do you want to go to college, too?" Theo asked in surprise.

"Of course I do," Joan declared.

Theo studied her embroidery carefully. "Well, I don't," she said slowly. "Aren't you glad of that, mamma? If you had three of us to get off, it would be harder than two—which is going to be about twice as hard as sending one."

"Two!" Joan repeated.

"Oh, you'll get there, sooner or later, if you've really set your heart on it. It's a little way you have."

"Thanks ever so much," Joan said.

Theo chose a fresh strand of embroidery silk. "I wonder," she said, "whether you really want to go for the pure joy of studying."

"Art for art's sake?" Joan suggested.

"Exactly, or because Jack is going?"

"Both," Joan answered.

"Then it isn't all unmixed zeal for an education?"

"Enough of it to make you treat the subject with more respect, Miss Theodora."

"And of course you'll be honor member of your class, seeing that Jack's sure to be."

"I'll make a pretty hard hit at it."

"Shall you take up law?"

"Perhaps."

"And go in as Jack's partner?"

"Perhaps."

"I'll bet you a pound of marshmallows, it won't be as silent partner. Well, I suppose you might do worse."

"And she might do decidedly better, at present," Mrs. Clayton remarked, with a glance at the books in Joan's lap.

Joan laughed. "You must blame Theo, mamma. She will keep starting such interesting subjects."

"Suppose you were to flee from temptation?"

Joan gathered up her books. "I'll go down to the grove." At the foot of the steps, she turned. "Be sure and call me, if any one comes," she said.

Mrs. Clayton shook her head. "Theo can see ——"

"But Theo doesn't like getting up lunches for people," Joan interposed.

"No, she does not," Theo admitted candidly; "but she'll do it, and she'll put plenty of red pepper in the sandwiches, though arsenic or strychnine would be even better," she laughed.

"Theo, how can you!" Joan protested.

"I'm afraid I can't, seeing we-all haven't any in the house. Now run along like a good child!"

Then as Joan disappeared 'round the corner of the house, Theo turned to her mother. "Mamma," she asked soberly, "do you suppose Joan is in earnest about going to college?"

"Very much so—about wanting to go, dear."

"Well, of course, Joan is generally in earnest about most things, but this seems such a new idea."

"Dating back, more or less, to the days when she used to declare that she meant always to do everything Jack did. Naturally, she wasn't thinking about college then—only of keeping pace with Jack. And she has never lost that determination. And I know that she and Jack have often talked over this college idea. It does appear rather a castle in the air at present, but perhaps ——"

"Oh, dear, what a dreadfully ambitious family

we are—at any rate some of us. I reckon Margie and I will help to balance things, but Bob's going to have his swing some day."

"Hyah be two ladies wantin' lunch," Tony announced from the hall doorway.

Theo got up reluctantly. "So do I," she said; "and why shouldn't they get me some, as well as I them?"

In the pantry she found Joan. "I—I thought I'd better come in," she explained. "I saw them from the grove."

"And didn't try to head them off!"

"On the contrary, if they had shown signs of going by, I think I should have rushed out and headed them in."

"I quite believe you." Taking the tray from Joan, Theo pointed dramatically to the door—"Go!" she commanded.

"But——"

"Go!" Theo repeated.

"Theo, you know it was understood between us, that you needn't attend to these things, unless——"

By way of further answer, Theo took her sister by the shoulders and ran her out of the pantry. "I won't forget the red pepper, my

dear, if that's what's worrying you," she promised, as she closed the door.

It seemed to Joan that business was very brisk the next hour; and though she told herself more than once, that of course Theo could manage all right, it was very hard to keep from rushing to the fore.

She came back to the house when her hour was up, wearing a decided air of relief. "You-all have been busy, haven't you?" she said of Theo, who was rocking idly on the piazza.

"Rather. It seems to me as if I had made enough sandwiches to fit out a whole orphan asylum for a day's picnic."

"You do make such delicious sandwiches," Joan observed. "I wish I had one at this moment."

"My dear, I haven't enough energy left to make you one, in spite of that delicate compliment. At present, I feel inclined to renounce all picnics for the rest of my life, if I have to make sandwiches for them."

"I suppose one could have a picnic—and not have sandwiches," Mrs. Clayton laughed.

"I very much doubt it, mamma."

"Well," Joan said, "Jack and I are going to

have a picnic over at St. Simon's on our birthday and you're coming to it, Theo mine."

"Will there be ——?"

"There will."

Theo looked resigned.

"Moreover, you'll be invited to make them."

"I shall send regrets," Theo declared; "that is, if I haven't already resigned this world of inns and sandwiches."

There were no more customers that morning. "Still, we-all have had six," Joan told Jack, as he came up the steps just before dinner.

"Six!" he repeated. "Six what?"

"Nuisances," Theo answered him.

"C-u-s-t-o-m-e-r-s!" spelled Joan.

"Oh!"

Joan gave her twin a little shake. "I believe you'd actually forgotten there was such a place as the Juniper Inn!"

Jack looked guilty.

"Happy boy!" Theo said.

"I—I've been thinking about so many more important things," Jack explained.

"Jack!" his twin exclaimed.

"You'd better apologize immediately," Theo advised laughingly.

"Wait until after dinner," Jack begged. "I can do it so much better then."

"You don't deserve any dinner," Joan declared. "Mamma, won't you sentence him to bread and water in his own room?"

"If I did, probably you would insist on sharing it with him," Mrs. Clayton answered.

"Bob's coming," Theo said; "he seems terribly afraid of taking us by surprise and giving us a shock, so he always begins to shout long before he gets within sight of the house."

"And here's Scott," Joan added. "Please, were you kept in?"

"Not I," Scott answered. "I'm the good boy of the class."

"Oh, I hope not," Joan protested.

"Don't you like good boys?"

"I don't think I know any," she laughed.

"Quits," Jack said. "Isn't Mr. Nicols coming, Scott?"

"Directly; he's looking up some reference or other. I don't know what he would do if there weren't any reference books in the world."

With the coming of Mr. Nicols and the children, there was a general move indoors for dinner.

"My, but it's been a hard morning!" Bob announced. "Miss Hallie is sort of unreas'nable. Seems like she always wanted her own way."

"Odd, isn't it?" Scott agreed. "Do you know, sir," he turned to his tutor, "that there have been times when I've noticed that little peculiarity in you."

"Ah!" Mr. Nicols smiled pleasantly. "Was this morning one of those times, I wonder?"

"It was."

Jack laughed. "It struck me that Greek had met Greek."

Joan looked up. "So you should have been kept in, even if you weren't?"

"Have you been having a hard time, too?" Bob asked Scott, his voice full of sympathy.

"Awful—don't you see how it has spoiled my appetite? Why, I shouldn't be able to eat a thing, if it were not for fear of worrying Mrs. Clayton."

Margie looked interested. "That's very nice of you," she said; "having a hard time don't make Bob not want to eat."

"Would anything on earth do that?" Jack asked.

"I've been studying, too," Joan said.

"All by your lonesome?" Jack asked.

"Very much so."

"Ah," Mr. Nicols looked up, "along what line?"

"I've been reading English history this morning, sir, and going over my Latin a little."

"History isn't half bad—modern history, I mean," Scott said.

"You can't say as much for some of the people who made it," Joan answered.

That evening after supper, Scott came out to the dining-room where all the family, but the two younger children, were gathered about the big lamp. Mrs. Clayton and Joan were reading, Theo was writing a letter, and Jack studying, as usual.

Scott went round to where Joan sat, laying a sheet of paper on the table before her. "Shall I stick this up in the office?" he asked. "I believe that is the proper place for public announcements."

Joan glanced up from her book in surprise; then she gave a little cry of wonder and delight.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!

*The Students of Nicols College Vote in Favor of
Co-Education!*

NOT A SINGLE DISSENTING VOICE!

PRESIDENT NICOLS WARMLY ENDORSES THIS
ACTION!

"Oh," Joan said, with a quick upward look of pleasure and gratitude. "Oh, if I only could—but I can't."

"Can't what, dear?" her mother asked.

Joan gave her the paper, going to lean over her shoulder while she read it.

"Please, mayn't we all know?" Theo asked, and Mrs. Clayton read it aloud.

"There, Joan," Theo said, "you see you won't have to study all by yourself after all."

"She can come, can't she, mamma?" Jack urged. "I hope you-all realize that that production is hand printed. If you only knew how many copies were spoiled before the committee was satisfied."

"The committee?" Joan asked.

"We are the committee," Jack's gesture included Scott and himself. "Mamma, you say

yes, don't you? Then it won't matter what Joan says—she will have to obey you."

"But ——" his mother began.

"Please, Mrs. Clayton," Scott interrupted, "don't let there be any 'buts,' or 'ifs'—or anything of that sort."

"But, boys, Mr. Nicols ——"

"Nicols wouldn't like anything better than half a dozen pupils, of the right sort," Scott declared. "I believe he'd rather teach than not."

"Evidently you are supposed to be of the right sort, Joan," Theo laughed.

"I am Jack's twin," Joan observed demurely.

"Now I wonder what you want for that?" Jack questioned.

"You've got an awful lot to live up to, Joan," Theo warned her sister.

"Please," Joan protested, "if you wouldn't all talk as if it were quite settled—when it's so impossible."

"Why impossible?" Mrs. Clayton asked.

"That's what I'd like to know," Scott exclaimed. "If you're holding off on account of Nicols —— well, if he didn't suggest the idea

himself, he certainly seconded it all right. And truly, it does make things a lot more interesting when there are several in the class."

"Then, Joan, dear," her mother said, "I think we will say 'yes' to this very kind offer, if it is quite as Scott says, and he is sure that Mr. Nicols ——"

"Sure, of course I'm sure," Scott insisted. "I don't see why we didn't think of it before, but the idea popped into my head to-day at dinner, and I rode right over and had a talk with Nicols. He's going to speak to you about it himself to-morrow morning, Mrs. Clayton—trust Nicols to do a thing up brown—but I couldn't wait until then."

"I'm 'way behind you boys," Joan said.

"I reckon you won't be long—behind one of us, at any rate," Scott laughed.

"And, mamma, how can I give three hours every morning?"

"Perhaps not quite three, Joan, but we can and must arrange for at least two."

"But who will attend to the customers—if there are any?" Joan asked.

"If you please," Theo said, "I didn't receive any complaints this morning, regarding my sand-

wiches. I dare say I haven't been putting in enough red pepper."

"Then it's quite settled," Scott said.

Mrs. Clayton smiled. "Yes, quite."

"Joan hasn't got all through with her list of 'buts,'" Jack laughed. "Still, after all, hers isn't the final authority. Get your books, little girl, and I'll show you what to expect to-morrow. I warn you, Nicols is a corker."

"Theo," Joan said later, when they were in their own room together, "Theo, you're a DEAR! And isn't it perfectly lovely to think I am to study with the boys. I don't suppose it will be for very long, though—Scott can't stay on down here forever—but even a short time will be something."

"I wonder how long he is going to stay?" Theo asked.

"I say, Joan," Bob remarked the next morning at breakfast, "what makes you look so smiling?"

"Isn't she sitting opposite you?" Scott asked.

"She sits there every morning," Bob said; "and I ain't any different to-day from any other day, am I?"

"It is to be hoped," Jack observed, "that you

do not always display such a large amount of jam on your mobile young countenance."

Bob dived for his napkin.

"I am going to school to-day, Bob," Joan explained.

"Good gracious!" Bob exclaimed. "Is that all! Well, you are a queer girl—queerer than most."

"Are you coming with us at ten, Joan?" Jack asked, as he and Scott left the table.

"I'm afraid I can hardly do that. Theo has to help mamma, and I must be on hand here."

"She'll appear in due time," Theo said, "if I have to escort her myself—and she shall at least come home with you."

And at about eleven o'clock, Joan made her appearance at the door of the old ballroom. She was welcomed heartily, and shown at once to the place made ready for her by one of the windows. And "our co-ed" as the boys called her, soon became a very promising member of the little class of three.

CHAPTER XV

HELEN

MARCH came, and still Scott showed no sign of leaving the inn. "And every day he stays means so much to us, doesn't it, Jack?" Joan said one evening, as she gathered up her school books. Scott had already gone away with his.

"I reckon it does," Jack answered, closing his own reluctantly. The big old-fashioned clock out in the hall had struck nine; and one of Mrs. Clayton's stipulations had been that study time was to end, at least for her young people, at nine o'clock.

These were busy days for all—and happy ones in the main. Business was more or less flourishing, though generally, as Joan declared, there was more "less" than "more" about it.

Lessons went regularly on, and Mr. Nicols rejoiced daily over the added attention, the new interest Scott brought to his work. Competition, though always of the friendliest, ran high.

His three pupils were coming slowly up the walk to the house one day, just before dinner,

gravely discussing some question started in class that morning, when Tony coming to the hall door, announced with all his usual importance, "Cust'mers, Miss Joan—two of dem."

Joan brought suddenly back from England and the sixteenth century to America and the twentieth, stared at Tony for a moment, as if wondering what he meant.

At which Jack—a laugh in his eyes—swung himself round with a quick movement before her. "“C-U-S-T-O-M-E-R-S!”" he spelled. "It's a quotation—please ma'am."

Joan laughed. "Honestly, I *had* forgotten for a moment."

"Far be it from me, to even hint at such a thing as a bread and water diet—for you."

"I guess not to-day. Nannie's made custard pie and you know what Nannie's custard pies are!" Joan exclaimed. "Theo, don't you bother—I'll come. What do they want, Tony, lunch or dinner?"

"It is to be hoped they don't want custard pie," Jack observed, softly.

"Dey-all didn't say, Miss Joan," Tony answered; "they druv up jest now in one of de hotel rigs and dey axed me was I Tony and I said

I wuz and dey said, leastways the young lady said, dat of co'rse dis was de Juniper Inn, and dey both got down. 'Twas a two seated rig, but dey wuz doin' dere own drivin'."

"Go take their order," Joan told him, going to put her books away.

Scott followed her, and they stood a moment talking outside the door of his room. Then something Joan said made the boy laugh.

The next moment came an eager cry from the "long room," a sudden soft swirl of skirts, and a young girl fairly threw herself upon Scott.

"Helen!" he cried. "How did you get here?"

"Aren't you glad to see me? I had to come. It was another case where since the mountain wouldn't come to Mahomet, Mahomet had to come to the mountain."

"Glad! I guess I am," Scott said. He turned to Joan, who was moving away. "Don't go, Joan. This is my sister Helen."

Joan held out her hand. "I'm ever so glad you've come," she said warmly. "You can't imagine how much I've been wanting to know you."

"I hope as much as I've been wanting to know you," Helen answered with equal warmth. "I

knew you were Joan as soon as I saw you just now; you're so exactly what I thought you would be like, which is really very gratifying in you, and I hadn't much to go by either—all I could get from Scott was that you had jolly brown hair, and the darkest eyes he'd ever seen, and were an all round good sort, which may have been complimentary, but wasn't very definite."

"Now look here, Helen," Scott interposed laughingly, "suppose you were to go it a bit slower. I'm used to you all right, but Joan——"

"She will be too, before long," Helen returned. "I may call you Joan, too, mayn't I? And you'll call me Helen? And please come now and be introduced to Aunt Margaret, she's in the 'long room.' You see, I know all about the Juniper Inn. And is the Hon. Robert at home? I'm just dying to see him."

"Joan," Scott said, "at home this young person frequently goes by the name of 'The Cyclone.'"

Joan laughed comprehendingly; she was feeling a bit dizzy and out of breath, but she had taken an instant liking to this slender girl, with her yellow-brown hair, and her brown eyes, and her delicate changing color.

Helen, though about a year younger than Joan was quite as tall, and in her perfectly appointed tan traveling suit looked even older. "Do come," she repeated, and the three went together into the "long room," where Miss Clarke was standing.

"Aunt Margaret," Helen said, "this is Joan. And oh, isn't Scott looking well?"

"Is it Joan—already?" Miss Clarke asked, as she gave Joan her hand. "I think," she said, "that I should have known it was Joan, without Helen telling me."

"There!" Helen exclaimed, with a soft clap of her hands. "Didn't I tell you so?"

Five minutes later Joan appeared on the back porch in eager search for her mother and Theo. "They're not customers at all," she announced breathlessly, "they're Scott's sister and aunt."

Theo gave her hair a hurried little pat, and straightened her neck ribbon. "Are—are they nice?" she asked.

"Indeed they are!"

"Well, they might not have been, simply because they were Scott's relations, you know," Theo said, answering the indignant note in Joan's voice.

Mrs. Clayton had risen. "We will go right in—come, Theo. Joan, you speak to Nannie—of course they must stay to dinner."

"Yes, mamma," Joan answered, and ran down the path to the kitchen door.

"Humph," Nannie said slowly, "I reckon dey'll be takin' Marse Scott back wid dem."

"Oh, dear," Joan said, she had not thought of that but of course they would. She ran away to gather some fresh flowers for the table, with a face grown suddenly sober. And she was bending over the violets, as she had been that day of Scott's first coming, when he and Helen came in search of her.

"Oh!" Helen said, stooping suddenly down beside the fragrant purple blossoms, "it is too lovely here. I don't wonder now that Scott hasn't wanted to come home. And we've had such a wintery sort of winter. Why it was snowing the day Aunt Margaret and I left New York."

"Snowing?" Joan repeated. "I'd love to see a good hard snow-storm."

"Haven't you ever seen any snow?" Helen asked wonderingly.

"It has snowed once or twice down here that

I can remember—though hardly enough to call it that—and it doesn't last, of course. If you only knew how I want to be out in a real storm and go coasting and have all the fun one reads about. Do you remember in 'Jack and Jill' how they were all coasting? I used to know that opening chapter almost by heart."

"Coasting is fun," Helen agreed, "and tobogganing." She stood a moment looking about her. "Please, is that the old ballroom?" she asked.

"Yes," Scott answered. "You should have seen it, Helen, Christmas night. I tell you, it looked pretty."

"It is given over to less frivolous proceedings now," Joan laughed.

Helen nodded. "I know. How do you like being a co-ed?"

"Like it? I just love it."

"She makes us fellows keep our eyes open, too," Scott said.

"There come the children," Joan said, as Bob and Margie came round the corner of the house.

"The Hon. Robert and his satellite Margie?" Helen asked. "Bring them here, Scott, please." Then as her brother moved away, she turned

quickly to Joan. "Oh, I love you all for being so good to him! You can't think how much better he is looking than when he left home."

"But we can't claim all the credit," Joan protested; "he is out so much—and then the change itself."

Helen shook her head. "It's not fresh air and change, at least, they've only helped a little. It's all of you being so good to him—and the home life and all that."

"I'm sure I'd like to think so," Joan said earnestly; "and you know, Helen"—the name came a little hesitatingly, "it hasn't all been on our side. Think what it has meant to Jack—and me—having him here."

"Please, I haven't seen Jack," Helen said.

"I think he must be in the grove with Mr. Nicols."

"Now Mr. Nicols. Joan, isn't it perfectly awful, the amount that man knows?"

Joan laughed. "But *he* isn't."

"He's a dear old thing. I took Latin with him last year."

"Helen," Scott said, coming up—two small wide-eyed children in tow, "allow me to present Miss Margaret Clayton—the very nicest little

girl in all Georgia—and her brother Master Robert Clayton ——”

“The very nicest little boy,” Helen interposed, holding out a hand to each.

Margie gave hers in return rather shyly ; but Bob smiled up into the newcomer’s face in a friendly fashion. “How do you do,” he said politely. “We-all are very glad to see you. You must make yourself quite at home.”

“Thank you,” Helen answered, none of the laughter in her eyes allowed to show itself in her voice, “you are very kind.”

“Not at all—not at all,” Bob assured her quite gravely. “I am sure any friend of my friend Scott ——”

“Bob!” Joan exclaimed. “Helen, shall we go back to the house now?”

Helen dropped behind with Bob. “So you and Scott are great friends?” she said.

Bob nodded. “Scott’s a—a wond’fully thoughtful boy for his age. He treats a fellow with a lot more respect than—Jack—than some boys do.”

“That’s very nice,” Helen remarked ; “I shouldn’t wonder if it had done him a lot of good being here at the inn.”

"It's a jolly inn, isn't it?" Bob asked.

"Indeed it is."

"Are you the only sister Scott's got?"

"The very onliest."

"I've got three."

"That's a good many, isn't it?" Helen commented.

Bob nodded again. "Y-yes," he admitted, "it is quite a good many, 'specially at Christmas time, and it's perfec'ly bewild'ring—the 'mount of birthdays there are ev'ry year 'mong them. But after all," he added, with a sudden smile up at Helen, "it isn't a bit too many."

"Come on, Helen," Scott called, turning round, "you haven't seen Jack and Nicols yet. There they are on the porch now."

"Scott," Helen said to him, after dinner, "I want another look at the portrait over your mantelpiece. I didn't half see it before dinner."

"Come on, then," Scott answered.

The big, pleasant room back of the parlor was bright and cheery with sunshine; through the wide open windows drifted the scent of roses.

Helen, sitting in the big armchair by the west window, looked about her slowly. "Isn't it delightful—I didn't half realize how delightful, in

that little glimpse I got of it before. Somehow, it reminds me—for all it is so entirely different—of the ‘best room’ in the old house in Salem. Perhaps it is the same general air of space and old-fashioned comfort.”

“Maybe,” her brother answered. “Helen, whatever possessed you to come down here?”

“Aren’t you glad to see me?”

“You know I am—mighty glad. Still I’d like to know why ——?”

“Well,” Helen said slowly, her eyes on the portrait over the mantel, “it was your letters, I think—they sounded so tempting. Then there didn’t appear to be any very definite prospect of ever seeing you again, unless I did. Poor Aunt Peggy did rather protest—it’s only about two months since we got back from Europe, but I was firm, though always kind, and in the end she yielded.”

“As she always does to you. She spoils you outrageously.”

“Scott, that’s a charming portrait.”

“Did I say it wasn’t?”

“And wonderfully like Joan.”

“Wonderfully.”

“Joan and I are going to be great friends.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Helen, why didn’t—mamma come with you?”

The girl’s face sobered instantly. “I tried to get her to; I coaxed my very best. But Scott, she won’t go anywhere—except to see ——”

Scott turned and began to pace restlessly up and down the room. Suddenly, with an abrupt movement, he stopped before his sister’s chair. “Helen, you—you haven’t been ——?”

She shook her head. “No, he—he won’t let me. I—I want to go—it seems so cruel—as if I—had cast him off. No one goes to see him but mamma. Hannah goes with her generally to—the place. Mamma will not even let me do that much. Scott, I can’t understand—can you—why God allowed—why all this awful thing had to happen? Sometimes, when I’m away from home like this, I forget it, or at least, it seems like some terrible dream and it seems to me as if everything must be all right at home—like it used to be—with the house all gay and cheerful, and people coming and going, and mamma so young and happy-looking, and—and he in the study—with his books ——” Helen’s lips were quivering.

Scott had begun to pace the room again; his face turned resolutely away from hers.

"I—I haven't been into the study since—since he went away," Helen went on slowly. "Oh, Scott, you can't realize how changed everything is—and mamma ——"

"Don't!" Scott interrupted her hoarsely.

"How long are you going to stay down here?" he added, after a moment's silence.

"Not very long—a fortnight perhaps."

"Or longer—perhaps," Scott suggested. "It isn't a bad sort of a place, you know. Have you been out on the Marsh road yet?"

"Why, we only got here this morning. We came out to the inn as soon as Aunt Margaret had seen our rooms. I wish I could come out here to stay, Scott."

"So do I. Shall I speak about it?"

"Oh, I must stay with Aunt Margaret; it wouldn't be fair, and it would be rather an imposition trying to work her in too."

"I don't think I could do that. This isn't a regular inn, you remember?"

"But it's so delightful looking."

"The hotel isn't at all bad."

"Oh, no—only I like this better."

"So do I," Scott answered, and they both

laughed, a good deal relieved at this return to more cheerful subjects.

Helen went over to the looking-glass and began smoothing her hair, and giving furtive little dabs at her eyes with her pocket handkerchief. "Hadn't we better hunt Aunt Margaret up?" she asked. "And, Scott, you'll come back with us this afternoon? And, Scott, there's an extra seat. Don't you think Joan might come—we'll have a nice drive—and dinner all together at the hotel."

"That would be fun," Scott agreed. "I'd like to do something for them. They've all been ever so good to me, you know, and they don't have such a lot of fun."

"Let's crowd a bit and ask both the older girls," Helen proposed. "Come on, I'm ready."

They found Joan on the front porch. "How perfectly lovely," she said, when Helen had given the invitation. "And Theo can go, I'm sure. I'll go tell her."

"But I want you both," Helen insisted.

Joan shook her head. "Indeed, I don't see how. I'll go find Theo—she will get ready right away."

Theo was in the pantry with Nannie. "But Joan," she protested, "you'd much better go."

"You're going, Theo—there's no use in arguing—you haven't had the least bit of an outing in ages."

"How cum hit you cawnt bofe go?" Nannie demanded.

"Why ——" Joan began.

"I reckon you tink I can't run this yere tavern by myse'f—go 'long, bofe er you—I ain't nigh so he'pless as you high-headed young uns taks me ter be."

"We-all don't take you to be anything but an old dear, Nannie," Joan assured her.

"Go 'long!" Nannie repeated.

CHAPTER XVI

MENDING AND MILLINERY

"THERE," Helen said, "I am glad it's Saturday." She gave the reins to Tony, and jumped lightly out from the low phaeton in which she and Miss Clarke had driven over from the hotel.

"Aunt Margaret's come, hoping Mrs. Clayton will take a drive with her," Helen went on; "and I hope it will be a good long one, because I'm to stay here until they come back."

"How nice," Joan said. "Won't you get out, too, Miss Clarke?"

"Thank you, I'll wait here," the other answered; "I'm afraid we're rather early comers, but you must blame Helen for that."

"It's so much pleasanter riding early," Helen said; "and I did want a good long visit over here."

"It isn't a bit too early," Joan insisted. "I'll go tell mamma. I'm sure she will love to go with you, Miss Clarke."

Helen, like her brother, had been quick to feel the simple charm of the home life at the old inn;

and though nominally stopping at the hotel with her aunt, she spent as much time as possible at the Juniper Inn.

"There," Helen repeated, a few moments later, as she and Joan stood on the steps watching Mrs. Clayton and Miss Clarke off for their drive, "I'm so glad it's Saturday."

"Why?" Joan asked.

"Why? Because that brother of mine declares that on all other week days, I simply must not come over here until after study hours, so I say, Blessed be Saturday!"

"You can come over any time you like," Joan said heartily; "no matter what day of the week it is. Why don't you come study with us,—that would be ever so nice?"

"Oh, no, thank you," Helen answered promptly. "There's a most delightful old doctor up at home, who advised a year's rest from study. He had a whole lot of reasons for it—principally my having grown too fast the past year. Nothing on earth would tempt me to disobey his orders."

"What a remarkably conscientious young person you are," Scott observed, coming up behind his sister.

"Yes," Helen answered, "I always try to set you a good example."

"Do I always follow it?" Scott laughed.

Helen shook her head. "I am afraid not." She turned to Joan. "Where's Theo?"

"Up-stairs, rummaging. She's going to trim a hat for Margie, and when we've anything of that sort on hand, instead of going shopping, we go—rummaging."

"What fun!"

"I don't know. I think it's lots of fun to go shopping."

"But any one can go shopping," Helen objected.

"Can they?" Joan laughed. "If that were so, why Theo would be dressing to go to town at this moment, instead of getting all hot and dusty, bending over no end of old boxes and chests in the garret."

"Oh, dear, I wish I were there too," Helen said longingly. "I simply adore garrets and old chests filled with all sorts of delightful stuff."

"Then you would like our 'red chest'; there's an old brocade in it that made its first appearance at Washington's inaugural ball."

"Oh!" Helen cried. "How perfectly lovely!"

We've got one too. Ours is cream color—or was—with tiny moss rosebuds all over it."

"Ours was pale green, with white roses."

"And just think," Helen cried eagerly, "those great great relations of ours must have met. Perhaps they danced in the same set."

"Mine danced with General Washington," Joan said.

"So did mine—and he complimented her on her dancing," Helen laughed.

"Probably he did mine too," Joan answered gaily; "but she forgot to put it down in her diary. Those ancestresses of mine were terribly addicted to keeping diaries—she was too busy writing down all the names of her partners. According to her, they were a goodly, also a numerous, lot."

"We've got a long way from Theo and Margie's hat, haven't we?" Helen said. "What are you going to do, Joan?"

"Mend—that is, if too many customers don't appear. 'Will you walk into my parlor,' or shall we bring our work down to the back porch?"

"May I come up?" Helen asked. She had never been up-stairs, and she had a very frank

interest in seeing what her friends' room was like. She found it a big pleasant corner-room, with deep dormer windows facing south and west. There was a wide fireplace, with broad overhanging brick chimney-piece. In one corner stood the lounge, piled high with cushions; in another, a quaint carved old dressing table; beneath one of the windows was an equally quaint old-fashioned work table, with low chintz-covered chair beside it; and the broad bedstead belonged to the same earlier period.

Helen, who knew a little about the value of such things, and had moreover the making of a first-class collector in her, gave a little cry of pleasure. "Oh," she said, looking about her with delighted eyes, "what beautiful mahogany!"

"It is pretty, isn't it?" Joan said, passing a hand lovingly over the polished surface of the dressing table.

"Pretty! It's magnificent!"

"And a good many fine ladies have sat at this old mirror," Joan said; "it used to belong to my great-great-Aunt Joan."

"The one whose portrait is in Scott's room?"

"Yes. It was brought out from the old coun-

try for her special use. She was a tremendous belle; there used to be a good deal going on in her time, over at the old place on St. Simon's. We-all have her diary, and she's always telling about having some Dolly, or Penelope, or Betty to stay with her and what outrageous little flirts they were. It's my private opinion she was every bit as bad—in her way."

Helen had settled herself on the lounge. "I don't see," she said, in her eager way, "how you ever can bear to come down-stairs and leave these delightful things—together it's the dearest room."

"Well, you see," Joan laughed, taking up her workbasket, "we-all are pretty sure of finding them here when we get back."

"You needn't be if Aunt Margaret ever gets to see them. Aunt Margaret's a—a terror—about such things."

"Who's a terror—and about what things?" Theo asked, coming in, her apron full of bright scraps of ribbons and silks.

"My Aunt Margaret," Helen told her; "and about old-fashioned furniture and china and so on."

"So's Joan—or getting to be," Theo said. She tossed the contents of her apron on the bed.

“Joan, I reckon I’ll have to make Margie a rainbow hat.”

“Margie’s entirely too young for beaux,” Joan answered, threading her darning needle.

Theo turned to Helen. “I’d like to know if you call that sisterly?”

Helen stretched herself out with a little sigh of content. “You wouldn’t call it brotherly, would you?” The next moment she was kneeling on the floor beside the bed, helping Theo sort over the variegated pile of silks and ribbons. “What beauties some of these are. Theo, I wish you’d let me trim Margie’s hat!”

“Could you?”

“May I show you?”

“Indeed you may and welcome. Then I can help Joan, her pile looks quite large enough for two to work at.”

“Oh, charity, thy name is Helen!” Joan exclaimed fervently. “Helen, you dear, you shall have a nice reward—when we’re all done.”

“Something to eat?” Helen asked, bending over some ribbons on her lap.

“Something to see—a cup that belonged once to—I’ll tell you who it belonged to, after you’ve seen it.”

"This house is so full of charming old things that I wouldn't be one bit surprised if you told me it had belonged to Mother Eve," Helen remarked.

"I hardly believe Mother Eve rejoiced in fine china tea-cups," Joan protested.

"She certainly wouldn't've if Tony had been anywhere on the scene," Theo declared.

Joan held up a small black stocking for general inspection. "How does Bob manage to do it? Just look at this hole!"

"Which one?" Theo asked.

"It does remind one," Joan said, "of the boy who had only one freckle—but that covered his face."

"I rather like to mend stockings," Helen said.

"I don't," Joan answered. "Helen," she added, "do you like picnics?"

"I adore them—when they're nice ones."

"Of course I'm only referring to the nice ones—the very, very nice ones. Then you'll come to ours?"

"Will I? When is it to be?"

"On Jack's and my birthday. We-all are planning to be sixteen very soon now."

"And those two generally do what they plan," Theo added.

"Sixteen—you might wait for me."

"Sorry to disappoint you—but we couldn't—not possibly," Joan said.

"How soon will it be then?" Helen asked, fashioning bits of pale blue ribbon into tiny knots with a deftness that to Joan appeared fairly marvelous.

"In exactly three weeks," Joan answered.

"And we've been down here a week now and only came for two," Helen cried.

"Oh, you'll have to stay over!" Joan exclaimed. "You must both come to our picnic. Can't you persuade your aunt?"

"Mercy, yes," Helen answered confidently. "Aunt Peggy's easily managed, it's only—I'll write mamma. Please, where is the picnic to be?"

"Over on St. Simon's."

"Then I can see the old house?"

"What's left of it," Theo said; "it was pretty well wrecked before that tidal wave we had several years ago added the finishing touches."

"If you could only 've seen St. Simon's before the tidal wave, Helen," Joan said regretfully;

"the poor old island certainly did suffer." She pushed back her chair. "There, I've finished my last stocking!"

"I'm not quite done yet," Helen answered.

"You ought to be a milliner, Helen," Theo said admiringly. "Joan, there're a lot of buttons to sew on."

"I know it—and if there's anything worse than mending stockings, it's sewing on buttons."

"Or any other kind of mending?" Theo questioned.

"Precisely. Dear me, I don't believe there's been a customer this whole morning. Business seems to be falling off."

"I did so hope this would be a busy day," Helen said. "I thought it would be such fun helping to run an inn. I quite intended to help."

"Fun!" Theo objected.

"Theo's ideas of fun do not embrace anything remotely connected with tavern-keeping," Joan observed, taking up her needle again. "Oh, dear, if the old fellow who invented buttons, had only gone a step further, and invented a kind that would stay on."

"It's a great pity," Theo said slowly, "that Jack isn't good at a needle—because then ——"

"If he was I'd disown him!" Joan exclaimed.

"*Regardez!*" Helen held up her work.

"How pretty!" Theo cried delightedly.

"Margie'll be so pleased," Joan said. "Helen, how did you do it?"

All around the crown of the broad Leghorn ran a circle of pale blue knots of ribbon, ending at the front in a soft cluster of pretty loops and ends; inside, to frame the face, was a ruching of white lace, broken here and there by smaller knots of the same delicate blue.

"And now, if you please, my reward," Helen said, laying the hat on the bed.

Joan went over to an old Indian cabinet hanging above the lounge, and opening it took out a small faded pink silk box. Sitting on the lounge beside Helen, she lifted the cover, and with careful fingers took out a little tissue-wrapped cup and saucer of quaint shape.

The delicacy of its coloring, the exquisite finish of the little Watteau figures, went straight to Helen's inborn love for things rare and beautiful. "Where did you get it?" she asked. "The beauty!"

"From my godmother," Joan answered; "it was given her by a dear friend, a nun in a con-

vent in Charleston, but it belonged originally to Marie Antoinette."

"Marie Antoinette!" Helen repeated slowly, and she held the little cup and saucer up with reverent hands. "We went to Versailles, Aunt Margaret and I, and we saw the Trianons—Joan, I know there must be a story connected with this cup."

"Probably," Joan answered. "I don't know it—only that the queen gave it to one of her favorite ladies in waiting, just before her execution, and that this same lady was also on the list of the proscribed, but managed to escape in some way."

"And I suppose," Helen said wonderingly, "that the queen has often drank out of this cup."

"Very likely."

"And how little she dreamed," Theo said, "that it would drift over to this country, and become the property of an unknown American girl."

"Well," Joan said gravely, "I'd rather be this same unknown American girl than have been Marie Antoinette."

"Put your precious cup up now," Theo said, "and let's go down-stairs. No one knows what

those two children may be up to—Saturday is generally mischief day.”

“It seems to me that when it comes to mischief, all days are alike to the Hon. Robert—it’s the desire, not the day, that counts with him.”

On the back porch, they found Jack and Scott; while from the garden came the sound of the children’s voices.

“They’ve been behaving pretty well,” Jack answered, in reply to a question from Theo. “Bob did run across a pot of paint—green paint, this time—but I ran across him in time to prevent anything very serious happening. A pot of paint anywhere within ten miles of the Hon. Robert seems to act like a magnet on him. I wonder if he’s going to be a great artist, or merely a house-painter?”

“Time alone will show,” Joan answered. “It is to be hoped that time also tones down his taste for color.”

“Particularly—if he is to be a house-painter,” Theo laughed.

“You must have had a fine gossip up-stairs,” Scott said; “Jack and I were just planning a search party.”

“We haven’t been gossiping a bit,” Helen de-

clared ; " but I've been seeing all sorts of lovely things."

" I'll warrant, Joan has been showing you her cup," Jack said.

" She showed me *a* cup."

" Which fully proves that she regards you as a friend. Only those with whom she feels it possible to commune soul to soul, ever get sight of that cup. I understand she intends some day to found an order—The Honorable Band of Cup Gazers."

" Jack, how can you ! " his twin cried.

Scott was looking suddenly distressed. " If you please—what cup ? I have never seen it, have I ? "

" You shall, any time you like," Joan told him.

" Oh, Scott," his sister cried, " it belonged to Marie Antoinette ! "

" Jove, that is worth having ! "

" It's a dear ! " Helen declared.

" It ought to be," Jack said, " seeing that it belonged to a very costly queen."

" But who paid the cost," Helen answered.

" Did she—in full ? " Jack questioned.

" Now, please," Joan protested, " if you only **won't** discuss that terrible French Revolution.

It's about the only subject on which Jack and I never have, and never will, agree. He's such a determinedly red-hot republican."

"I don't know why it is," Jack remarked, "that girls—most girls, at any rate—always argue from their prejudices; while a fellow reasons calmly from ——"

"As if," Theo interrupted, "every one didn't know that men—young or old—were the most *unreasonable* of creatures."

"What a strange assertion," Jack said gravely.

"It's a perfectly true one," Theo insisted; "I can give you any number of illustrations, if you like."

"Wouldn't they be, like a good many of the modern illustrations, rather highly colored?" Jack asked.

"They'd be drawn from life," Theo retorted.

"Cust'mers, Miss Joan," Tony announced, coming to the door. "Four of dem an' wantin' lunch—dey's wheelers."

"Tony, you're a jewel—a regular black diamond," Jack cried softly. "I was just about to make a most crushing retort to that older sister of mine. It might have hurt her feelings—I'd hate to hurt your feelings, Theo."

"Would you?" Theo laughed. "Anyhow, you wouldn't have convinced me in the least."

"Joan," Helen asked, following her indoors, "mayn't I help? I do so want to."

"Why, if you really want to," Joan assented; "there isn't much to do—just to get a tray ready."

"I wish I could run a tavern," Helen sighed, cutting bread and butter into the thinnest of pieces.

Joan laughed, as she opened a bottle of olives. "It isn't all pure unadulterated joy."

"I don't suppose anything is in this world," Helen answered wisely. "Joan, where did you get such a lot of lovely old blue and white china?"

"It *is* pretty old, also pretty and old. We all don't run much to new things in this house, for the best of reasons, too—'cause we can't."

"Is it all ready?" Helen surveyed the tray with interest.

"Yes, I'll call Tony. Thank you ever so much. You've got a deal of what Nannie calls 'capability.'"

Helen laughed. "We have had a nice, busy morning, haven't we?"

“We have, and this afternoon we-all are going to play. You aren’t going back with your aunt—you’re going to stay here over Sunday. We’ll let Scott ride over and get your things, if you want anything, and this afternoon we’ll have out Dolly and the old carryall, and we’ll have a drive—all five of us. You won’t mind squeezing? I reckon this inn can run itself for that long, with Nannie and Tony’s help. I used to think at first it couldn’t, but I’m getting wiser every day.”

Helen’s eyes danced. “What a lovely afternoon we’ll have, and I can do my hair at your dressing-table?”

“Assuredly. We’ll send Theo off to sleep with mamma for to-night.”

“She won’t mind—being turned out of her room?”

“Not she—she’ll be glad of the excuse to be with mamma.”

“There’s the carriage,” Helen cried. “I’ll go tell Aunt Margaret.”

CHAPTER XVII

PICNICKING

BOB sauntered down the hall, wearing his jauntiest air. "Good-morning," he said to Scott, who was standing in the front doorway.

"Why, good-morning, commodore."

"Nice day for our picnic, isn't it?" Bob had the genial manner of having specially provided the weather himself.

"Fine," Scott agreed. "Seems to me, you're gotten up in great style, aren't you?"

Bob glanced complacently down at his blouse suit of fresh linen. "But you see, this is a birthday picnic."

"And are birthday picnics different from other kinds?"

Bob puckered up his forehead. "I really don't know so very much about any other kind—in fact, I've had very little 'sperience of them. Ours mostly are birthday ones. I did go to the Sunday-school one last year. It *was* fun, but it *wasn't* so—so s'lect as ours."

"Oh, it wasn't?" Scott said.

"I—I ain't going to school to-day."

"So I supposed. We're all going to have a holiday, even Mr. Nicols."

"Miss Hallie isn't."

"And what will Miss Hallie do without you all day?" Scott questioned.

"I reckon she'll get along. I told her we-all weren't coming. We're staying home on purpose to go to the twins' picnic."

"That's mighty good of you."

"It wouldn't be any fun 'less we all went; Joan said so."

"And I rather reckon Joan knows," Scott said.

"Joan knows a lot about picnics and some other things too," Bob observed thoughtfully. "Did you see the present I made her for her birthday?"

"Not yet."

"It's a—a pho-to-graph frame. I cut it out of a segar box, with my new knife."

"That was quite a scheme," Scott commented gravely. "And what did you make Jack, anything?"

Bob's little face sobered. "N-nothing—but I g-gave him my—a knife."

Scott whistled and gave Bob a sudden friendly clap on the shoulder, that somehow made him feel sort of comfortable inside.

"Breakfast," Theo called, coming to the dining-room door. "Oh, good-morning, Scott. Lovely day, isn't it?"

"Evidently my little message to the clerk of the weather had good effect," Scott laughed.

Margie, coming down-stairs, very crisp and fresh, in clean blue chambray, stopped midway to stare down at him wonderingly. "Can you really get any kind of weather you want, just by asking for it?" she asked.

Scott smiled up at the sober little face. "I guess you've never seen the big storeroom, where the weather man keeps all his different kinds of weather—all in big glass jars, carefully labeled—and when any one wants any particular kind they just say, 'Please, Mr. Weatherman, I'd like an afternoonful of this, or a dayful of that,' and if the old fellow's feeling good-natured he takes down the right jar and ladles out some."

"Like Joan or Theo does the jam for our supper?" Margie asked.

"Exactly."

Margie came down another step or two, then

she halted again. "I think likely that was a make-b'lieve, wasn't it?"

"Of course it was," Bob told her. "Do come on, Margie, breakfast's ready. I s'pose you don't want to miss that boat, and there's a lot to be done yet."

"That was a very nice make-b'lieve," Margie said, slipping her hand into Scott's, and going on to the dining-room with him.

"Was it?" he laughed.

"Maybe you'd like to tell some more of it—some time," Margie insinuated.

"You'll get yourself into business, if you once start in telling that young lady stories," Theo warned him. "Oliver Twist isn't in it with Margie—when it comes to wanting more stories."

"Chevalier's going to-day," Bob announced, hopping excitedly along on one foot. "Chevalier does so enjoy picnics."

"And we-all always give him some of our dinner," Margie added, "he's very fond of sandwiches."

"Theo's made ever 'n' ever so many sandwiches," Bob said.

"Indeed she has," Theo laughed.

"Good-morning, Joan," Scott called, catching

sight of her whisking about in the pantry beyond.

She came in smiling. "Good-morning. Did you ever see anything so ridiculous as these children—they couldn't be much more excited if we were starting for Europe."

"But this is such an important event. One doesn't go to sixteenth birthday picnics very often."

"Please, thank you so much," Joan held up a tiny gold pencil, fastened to a slender chain.

"Helen chose it."

"And it was so lovely—giving Jack one, too."

"How does it feel to be sixteen?"

"Can't you remember?" Joan laughed back. "I don't believe it's so very long since you reached it yourself."

"You don't look much older."

"Nor wiser? I did turn my hair up, or rather, Theo did for me. She took such pains with it—and it looked fine—but Jack was quite indignant. He said he hadn't altered the arrangement of *his* back hair, and he didn't see why I needed to, so I took it down again."

"I think I agree with Jack," Scott said.

"Ah, but you should've seen it the other way."

"I dare say I will some day."

"Oh, Joan," Jack called from the pantry, "where in the world are those Japanese napkins?"

"Right behind you. Jack, breakfast's ready. Theo says if you don't come, she'll turn your coffee, and you know you don't like it cold."

Which threat brought Jack instantly.

"It's a mercy we-all don't indulge in picnics every day in the year," he declared; "that is, if we are anxious to keep our senses. Bob had me awake at all hours of the night, to say nothing of the morning, as if anything would induce that captain to go off without us. Probably, he has been counting the days for the past month. Halloa, old man"—to Scott—"thanks awfully, for the pencil. It's a beauty."

"Why has the captain been counting the days?" Margie asked.

"You don't suppose he gets such a charming crowd to carry every day, Snipwinkle?"

"I'm going up with mamma's tray now," Theo said. "She wanted to come down to breakfast, but considering that she is going to dissipate to such an extent later, I thought it wiser for her to rest as long as possible beforehand."

"Tell her she needn't hurry too much," Bob said. "I reckon we-all've got plenty of time."

There was a general air as of holiday making at the table that morning.

"Isn't it good mamma is able to go too," Joan said; "and it's so nice, Scott, that Miss Clarke and Helen waited on. Jack and I feel highly complimented."

"You certainly ought to over the fact that Nicols is going. I'm sure it must be his first picnic. I'm awfully curious to see how he will stand it; one can't quite imagine Nicols at a picnic."

"It'll do him a lot of good," Bob predicted; "trouble with Nicols is he takes life too—too seriously."

"Bob!" Joan exclaimed, while Scott went off in a paroxysm of laughter.

"Well, I heard Dr. Burley say so," Bob said.

"Was he talking to you?" Jack asked quietly.

"N-no," Bob answered, fidgeting uncomfortably.

"Really, Bob, you must not repeat things so," Joan said seriously. "I wonder," she added, turning to the others, "if there'll be a regular rush to-day. We-all haven't had more than two

or three customers in as many days—so it seems fairly safe leaving the inn to Nannie and Tony, but in the inn business there's no counting."

"There assuredly hasn't been much counting of profits the last few days," Jack laughed.

"There may be a rush to-day," Joan said.

"Let 'em rush," Jack answered. "Oh, here you are, Theo, just in time to give another cup of coffee—and as good as this was, please ma'am. Yes, let 'em rush—the city boarder, the hospitable hostesses, the ubiquitous small boy, not to mention the small boy's sister, and the genial clerk, will all be far away, braving the perils of the briny deep."

Margie looked grave. "What perils?"

"I haven't thought them up yet," Jack answered. "I'll let you know by to-night."

After breakfast came the hurry of getting off, final directions to Nannie and final warnings to Tony. Then, after what appeared to Bob and Margie an utterly preposterous waste of time, Mrs. Clayton, Theo, Jack and the children were started off ahead in the carryall, while Joan and Scott followed on their wheels and Chevalier darted here, there and everywhere, barking and leaping with delight.

Down at the pier, they found Miss Clarke, Helen and Mr. Nicols waiting. Helen had hired a wheel for the day, to ride over on the island. "Mr. Nicols suggested it last night," she told Joan; "he's really getting quite practical."

"I'm so glad he did," Joan said; "I don't see why we didn't think of it before. Now we can have a beach ride. Have you ever gone wheeling on the beach?"

"Never."

"Oh, Joan," Theo called, and Joan turned away.

"Scott," Helen said, "Aunt Peggy and I've bought our tickets."

"You have?"

"For Tuesday night. Now we'll *have* to go. I told Aunt Peggy, if we didn't make some sort of really definite move, we'd never get started."

"And to-day's Thursday," Scott was counting.

"Scott ——"

"Yes?"

"You wouldn't—Scott, when are you coming back home?"

Scott shook his head. "I haven't made up my mind."

"I wish—you'd—let me make it up for you," Helen said coaxingly.

"Don't bother, Helen—that's a good sort. I say," Scott came nearer, "just see Nicols—why the old boy looks really waked up."

Helen nodded. "As if he were really a live man—not a mere walking encyclopedia."

"Come on," Bob called and the party went on board. A moment or so later, the little boat was steaming out from the pier with all the fuss and bustle of which a small boat is capable.

"Don't you love to go on the water?" Margie asked, nestling up to where Helen stood leaning against the forward rail, the fresh air blowing full in her face.

"Indeed I do," Helen answered smiling down at the demure little face almost hidden in the depths of a big white ruffled sunbonnet.

"Maybe you'll see where we-all used to live. It's ever so nice over there."

"Nicer than at the inn?"

"N-no, but it's very nice. There's the beach, you know, and the ocean. Bob says that when he's a man he's going to build the old house all up again, so we-all can go live in it."

"And leave the inn?" Helen asked.

"But I reckon there won't be any inn by then," Bob said, coming up. Bob's gait was extremely nautical. "It's only a sort of—of temp'rary 'fair, that we-all started to—to tide over pres-present dif'culties. If Jack and I'd only been bigger we'd never 'lowed it."

"Of course not," Helen agreed with a gravity Bob found very gratifying. When one was very much in earnest oneself, it was most unpleasant not to be taken seriously.

"Nearly there, Helen," Joan said, coming to stand beside her friend.

"Yes. How green everything looks from here."

"Jack calls this side the 'tropical zone.' Over where we are going one sees mostly the beach and ocean."

On the landing they found the carriage hired for the occasion drawn up in readiness; and while Jack and Theo looked after the comfort of the driving party, the four who were to wheel started on ahead to select a place for the day's camp.

It was a pretty ride through a winding, quiet, tree-shaded road, bordered on either side by a thick undergrowth of palmetto, and ending at

last in a wide open beach, that sloped gradually down to the ocean.

In a corner formed by one of the cottages wrecked by that all-destroying tidal wave, they found what promised a pleasant resting-place, sheltered from the wind blowing in from the ocean, but bright and sunny.

And here, when the rest of the party drove up, shawls were spread out, cushions piled and umbrellas tilted to just the right angle.

Then Bob and Margie were sent to gather driftwood to start a fire, for the cup of hot coffee, which Theo declared Miss Clarke and Mrs. Clayton must certainly have. "Though you don't look as tired as I feared, mamma," she said, tucking another cushion at her mother's back.

"I am not at all too tired—just pleasantly so," Mrs. Clayton answered. "Joan, are you off again?"

"We-all are going for a short ride, mamma."

"Dinner at twelve—sharp," Theo said.

"We'll be back," Joan promised.

Jack had already retired to a secluded spot with a book; Bob and Margie were digging in the sand, with Chevalier frisking about them.

"After all," Margie said, smiling across the fort they were making, at Bob, "if we-all *lived* here, we wouldn't have such a nice place to come to."

"Then I s'pose we'd find some other nice one," Bob answered.

"Did you-all go to the old house?" Theo asked, when the wheeling party returned.

"No, we're going after dinner," Joan answered. "There wasn't time this morning to do it justice."

"Speaking of dinner," Bob remarked strolling up, "reminds me that Margie said just now that she was awful hungry."

"And you?" Scott asked.

"Well, I didn't eat such an extra big breakfast," Bob answered.

Helen had thrown herself down beside her aunt, her head in the latter's lap. "It's a perfect beach, Aunt Peggy;" then with one of her quick changes she added in an undertone, "but oh, Aunt Peggy, sometimes it does seem too unbearable—to be out like this in the open—and to remember—and he was so fond of the sea-shore and the water."

Miss Clarke patted the girl's cheek softly, without speaking. A moment Helen lay quite

still, looking out over the restless tumbling ocean, then she sprang up, going to help Joan unpack the lunch baskets.

Theo was making fresh coffee, Jack sorting dishes and offering suggestions in his most paternal tone, while Scott headed the children in another forage after driftwood.

"Mercy," Helen exclaimed, "I reckon you ——"

"You-all goes better with the 'reckon,'" Jack interposed.

"I reckon you-all then," Helen went on, "must have thought you were getting ready to feed a small army."

"Oh, Nannie knows a thing or two about putting up lunches for picnics," Joan laughed; "she's had considerable experience in this line. Aren't you hungry?"

"Starved!"

"In that case," Mr. Nichols remarked, "I would suggest your only taking a very small amount of food—and that very simple."

"Bread and water, for instance?" Jack asked.

"Or bread and milk," Mr. Nicols answered.

"Please don't suggest anything of the sort,"

Helen said ; " I'd hate to seem to treat any suggestion of yours lightly, Mr. Nicols, but ——"

" Now," Theo said, coming up with her coffee-pot, " are we ready ? "

" We are," Jack assured her heartily. " Hal-loa, you people, dinner's ready."

Scott and the children came hurrying up. " You can't say we don't obey promptly," Scott said.

" I've seen that sort of obedience before," Jack told him.

" Bob and I are going to have coffee," Margie confided to Helen ; " we always do at picnics."

" But somehow," Bob observed, " it never does look just like the others. I reckon Theo never does forget to weaken it—Theo's got a ter'ibly good mem'ry."

" Here, Bob," Joan told him, " just pass these plates, please."

" A small boy should always try to make himself useful, my son," Jack added.

" To-night, when we-all get home, there'll be the birthday cakes," Bob told Helen, when the plates had been passed.

" But, of course, you will only be able to take a very, very small piece and that merely out of

consideration for Joan's and my feelings," Jack said.

Bob smiled loftily. Some speeches were not worth noticing.

It was a charming dinner; and they were all frankly hungry; even Mrs. Clayton bringing to it a new appetite, due to the ocean breeze and crisp salt air.

"Picnics agree with you, mater," Jack said.

"I knew it would do mamma good," Bob added.

Joan touched her mother's cheek lovingly. "You're getting back your old color, mater mine. Theo," she added, turning to her elder sister, "the sandwiches are fine. There isn't a bit too much red pepper—they're really ——"

"Bully," Scott suggested.

"Thanks," Joan answered, "that's the very word I wanted to use."

"They cert'inly are good," Bob observed, tackling his fourth. "I would say 'stremely so."

"Praise from the Hon. Robert, is praise indeed," Jack parodied.

"And taken in conjunction with cold roast chicken," Miss Clarke remarked, "what better could one ask for?"

Not that there were not plenty of other good things. Nannie, as Joan had said, knew a thing or two about putting up lunches for picnics.

"And I see now," Helen said to Joan, as later they were re-packing the baskets, "that Nannie didn't estimate so far wide of the mark. What a hungry crowd we were!"

"And we've got to get hungry again before supper time," Joan laughed. "Nannie'll have a regular birthday supper for us. Helen, you're coming back with us; we're going to keep you over night."

"Are you?" Helen said. "'Barkis is willin'.' Now can we go on our exploring expedition?"

"Won't you come with us, Miss Clarke?" Joan asked. "Jack is going to drive us up."

"Do come, Aunt Peggy," Helen urged, and Miss Clarke agreed.

Theo was to stay with her mother. It only made her homesick, she said, to see the poor dilapidated old house. The children were also left behind—the little trip having no novelty for them, and the carriage being rather crowded as it was.

A two-mile drive along the beach brought them to the ruins of the big old-fashioned man-

sion, once the centre of all that was gay and hospitable for miles around. Hardly more than the outer shell was left standing now, with empty window and door places, and with the thick green undergrowth pushing its way up through decaying floors into the once spacious rooms. At one side, a fine old avenue led back inland. It was choked now with fallen branches and logs, thrown and tossed here and there by that same devastating tidal wave.

"We used to be able to go inside," Joan said, as they stood looking up at the battered old wreck of a house. "I have even been up-stairs, but since the last storm it is hardly safe to venture in at all."

"But mustn't it have been a delightful place to have lived in once!" Helen exclaimed. "Think of the water view from those upper windows."

"Or, best of all, from that cupola up on top," Scott added. "One would have both land and water view from there."

"That's 'Mistress Judith's Lookout,'" Joan said.

"Oh," Helen cried, "and for why?"

"A rather good reason."

Helen pulled Joan down beside her on the warm sand. "Sit down, Aunt Peggy; sit down, gentlemen; Joan's going to tell us a story."

"Not very much of a one," Joan said. "Mistress Judith Clayton was one of our innumerable great-great-aunts."

"Who were also great, great flirts," Jack added.

"Indeed they were," Joan agreed. "Well among the many admirers of Mistress Judith were two whom she ——"

"Heartless little minx ——" Jack put in.

"Liked rather better than the rest," Joan went on. "One of them was an officer in the navy, the other a planter living some miles inland. Well, one day when the captain's ship was about due, Mistress Judith was up in the cupola—it hadn't got its name then—and she saw a vessel come to anchor out there in the offing, and a little boat let down. She guessed who was coming and ran up a little flag to signal him; then she happened to turn her glass inland—and there was the planter riding toward the house—and all at once she made up her mind that she would marry the one who got there *first*."

"And which did?" Helen asked.

"They both got there at the same time!"

"And ——?" Helen asked.

"When she got down-stairs, she found her father home from Charleston, and he had brought back with him a gentleman, whom she married not long after."

"Horrid thing," Helen exclaimed; "I know my officer was too good for her."

"Helen is nothing, if not positive," Miss Clarke laughed.

Then she and Mr. Nicols and Jack strolled away for a more extensive survey of the old house, leaving the other three sitting there in the sand, talking idly of different things. Presently, Helen went down to the carriage for her camera. "Of course I must snap the house," she said, "and incidentally—you," she turned the camera toward the two sitting on the beach. "Joan, you never flickered an eyelash."

"Oh, I'm getting used to it," Joan answered.

"I want all the pictures I can get between now and Tuesday," Helen said.

"Tuesday?"

"Aunt Margaret and I start north Tuesday night."

"Oh, dear—must you?"

"We surely must." Helen moved away for a better view of the house.

"Tuesday night," Joan said, turning to Scott, "that's only five days. Somehow, it seems as if we'd always known Helen. We-all 'll miss her dreadfully."

"And she you," Scott answered; "I wish, for her sake, she could stay longer. Joan, has—has she ever spoken to you of—of what I told you?"

"No—not a word."

"But—you—you mustn't think that—that she doesn't feel it terribly. Aunt Margaret says that sometimes she almost breaks her heart over it—and that at home, she isn't at all the same Helen she has been down here. She—she is going back now because she thinks she ought not to leave our mother alone so long."

"I know," Joan said softly. "She's a dear—Helen is. I suppose that you——"

"Will be going, too, soon?" Scott asked, throwing tiny pebbles at an inquisitive bird, watching them from the branch of a palmetto tree.

"If not sooner?" Joan laughed.

"You mean—Tuesday night?"

She nodded.

Scott shook his head slowly. "Why I haven't ——"

Helen had gone down to the water's edge, and she stood there looking out over the ocean, one hand holding on to her hat brim, her slender erect figure swaying a little with the breeze.

"She should have had the ring," Scott said suddenly, more as if speaking to himself. "It is she who has kept—is keeping—faith."

Joan looked at him questioningly.

Scott took a small box from his pocket, and opening it handed Joan a ring.

She studied it with quick interest. "S-e-r," she spelled, "'Servabo Fidem.'" Oh, how fine! Is it yours?"

"Motto, or ring?" Scott asked.

"I meant the ring—but doesn't the one include the other?"

"I suppose it ought to. Yes, the ring's mine; it was sent me last Christmas. It belonged to—it's an old family ring. That's our family motto."

"You've never worn it?"

"No—if there had been no other reason—how could I? As I said, it should have been given to Helen."

“‘I will keep faith,’” Joan repeated softly, turning the ring about in her hand; then she half turned toward the boy, lying with face propped between his hands, on the sand beside her. “Are you sure,” she asked, handing the ring back to him, a little note of daring in her voice; “are you quite sure, that it should have been given to—Helen?” and without waiting for any reply, she jumped up and ran down the beach to where Helen still stood looking out over the water.

“Well,” Theo said, when the little party returned, “I’d begun to think you-all had started right in to rebuild the old house.”

“That will come later,” Jack answered.

“I hope it will,” Helen laughed, “and I get an invitation to pay you a good long visit.”

“We’ll give you the invitation now,” Joan laughed.

“And I accept, with pleasure, now.”

“But what’s happened to Margie?” Joan asked, catching sight of her little sister sitting, wrapped in a shawl, at the other side of Mrs. Clayton.

Theo waved an explanatory hand toward

where the blue chambray, so crisp and fresh that morning, lay spread out on the sand to dry.

"Has there been an accident?" Miss Clarke asked.

"Oh, just a little mis-mishap," Bob answered, looking up from the putting on of his shoes and stockings. "Nothing 'tall ser'ous—though there might've been—I told her not to go so near."

"And when she went still nearer," Theo explained, "Bob rushed heroically in to save her—for what reason, I know not, she being in not the least danger—and in his excitement, so bewildered the poor child that she fell flat down, right in the lap of an incoming wave."

"Margie is not the first person who has felt the need of deliverance from her friends," Jack said.

"Friend—in this case," Theo corrected, "Bob being only one."

"I haven't a doubt he displayed energy enough for two," Jack answered; "after all, one or other, if not both, of them had to come to grief, for the perfect rounding out of this picnic."

"You-all can laugh all you want," Bob pro-

tested indignantly; "but maybe if I hadn't acted quick—something might've happened."

Margie, at least, looked impressed. "Was that 'perils on the briny deep'?" she questioned, turning to Jack.

"Rather in the briny shallows," Jack laughed.

Margie went to sit beside Bob, whom she felt was not receiving the respect due to a would-be life-saver. "I don't know 'xactly what that means, do you?" she whispered.

Bob gave his shoe-string an impatient twitch. "Putting on shoes and stockings ain't half so much fun as taking them off. I ain't bothering my head over what Jack means. I've got more 'portant subjects 'grossing my thoughts."

Jack was looking at his watch. "Time to break camp!" he announced.

And Margie's dress being dry, Theo helped her on with it, while Joan and Helen and the boys gathered up wraps and baskets.

Miss Clarke had declined Joan's invitation to supper. She had enjoyed her day immensely, she assured them, but thought it would be wiser to rest that evening.

Mr. Nicols, however, had accepted with an alacrity that gave Helen considerable amuse-

ment. "The dear old fellow is getting terribly dissipated," she confided to Scott.

Scott nodded agreeingly. "Though after all, he isn't exactly a Methuselah," he added.

"No," Helen said thoughtfully; "and if he keeps on he will get as young as any one. It seems to me, this must have been the place where Ponce de Leon found his fountain of youth and that the writers have got it wrong."

"Write up your theory for the magazines," Scott suggested. "Important Discovery—wouldn't Brentwick get a boom?"

"And the Juniper Inn do a rushing business," Helen said.

"Joan," Scott said, as the little boat reached the home wharf, "I've got to see my aunt home to the hotel and then I've an errand, but I'll be out to the tavern pretty soon."

"Shall we wait supper?"

"Oh, I'll be in time for supper," Scott answered.

Going back the wheeling party went on ahead; as they neared the inn Joan exclaimed, "There's the doctor! He promised to come out to supper, if he could and, why there's Mr. Porter!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TREASURE CLOSET

"AND now," Mr. Porter looked about the table, lifting his glass as he spoke, "to the long life, prosperity and happiness of our young friends, whose birthday we are celebrating."

The birthday-supper was over, the cakes had been cut, and Mr. Porter had been making a speech in good old-fashioned manner.

The health was drunk standing; the gentlemen pledging themselves in wine, Mrs. Clayton in warm cocoa, the young people in iced tea, and Bob and Margie in milk.

"And if variety of mediums possesses any virtue, you two ought to live to be octogenarians," Theo commented.

Then Jack rose to respond for himself and Joan, doing it very well, too. After which they all adjourned to the parlor.

"It has been a nice birthday, Jack, hasn't it?" Joan said, going to sit on the lounge beside her twin.

“Very—only, I haven’t seen much of you—to talk to, I mean. Joan, what do you suppose makes Mr. Porter keep looking at us so oddly?”

“I hadn’t noticed that he was. Jack, what do you suppose this new year will bring you and me? The last brought a lot of changes, didn’t it?”

“It certainly did. I hope we-all will revert during this—to the old ways.”

“And give up the Juniper Inn?” Joan asked.

“And give up the Juniper Inn.”

“Oh, Jack!”

“See here,” the doctor said, sauntering over to the corner where the lounge stood, “what mischief are you two plotting now?”

“It’s worse than mischief—it’s rank heresy, on Jack’s part,” Joan answered.

“It’s worse than mischief—it’s rank unreasonableness, on Joan’s part,” Jack added.

“How much longer were you calculating to keep that nonsensical sign up?” the doctor asked.

Something in his tone made Joan glance quickly over to where her mother and Mr. Porter were talking very earnestly—and where beside Mr. Porter stood the empty chair the doctor had just left. “I believe,” she said slowly, “that it

is you three who have been plotting mischief—of some sort. And I thought you-all were just talking over old times!” she ended, with a swift change of tone.

“So we were,” Dr. Burley said, “at first; then about—new times.”

Joan shook her head reproachfully.

“Treason in the camp!” Jack said. “I feel an inward conviction, young lady, that the cause is doomed.”

“I don’t think I like inward convictions,” Joan said.

“What are you looking so sober over, Joan?” Helen called, from her place beside Theo. “Is Dr. Burley prescribing something very horrid?”

“I reckon that’s just what he’s getting ready to do,” Joan said.

“And it won’t be the kind of a prescription one can accidentally drop out of the window,” Jack remarked.

“Is that the way you treat my prescriptions, miss?” the doctor asked Joan.

At Helen’s question, Mr. Porter had looked up. “One shouldn’t look sober on one’s sixteenth birthday; that’s a fact, Miss Joan,” he said. And presently as the little groups broke up, Theo going

up-stairs with her mother who was tired, Mr. Porter drew Joan a little to one side. "How about those dreams?" he asked.

"Dreams?" then Joan remembered; "I reckon they're all here still," she said, with a smile.

"As bright as ever?"

"Brighter—and about as unsubstantial."

"I'm glad of that—the brightness, I mean," Mr. Porter said, smiling too. "I approve of day-dreaming—I've been doing some myself lately."

"Have you?" Joan answered. "I hope *they'll* come true."

"So do I—I think they will—they ought to—when an old fellow like myself sets his heart on anything he ought to have his wish; don't you think so, Miss Joan?"

"Doesn't that depend on the wish?" she laughed.

"Not a bit of it. Miss Joan, let's you and I take a turn or two out there on the porch—these people can get on without us for a while. I suppose," Mr. Porter added, as they went out together, "that you are all pretty fond of this old place."

"I reckon we are, mighty fond of it," Joan answered. "It's home, you see."

“And no other place could ever be that?”

“Not in the same way, could it?” Joan asked.

“Perhaps not—and yet——” Mr. Porter said slowly.

And to Joan it really seemed as if there had been a little note of—could it be regret—in his voice.

They were pacing slowly up and down the wide veranda, and for a few moments neither spoke. Joan was thinking over what Mr. Porter had just said, wondering whether there could have been any special meaning in his words, then her thoughts went back to the doctor's words—with their undercurrent of seriousness—to Jack's laughing prediction—and involuntarily she came to a sudden standstill at the head of the low steps, her eyes raised to where the old sign hung. Four months and over since that sunny December morning when she had first caught the sound of its creaking. Four months—and in some ways, it seemed only yesterday that they had held that meeting in the grove. She could hear Jack's final protest now—and again, in some ways, how far off that first day seemed. But she was glad—even if, as Jack declared, the cause was doomed, that they had had those four months—that the

Juniper Inn had existed even for such a short time—glad for so many reasons—for Jack's sake, for Scott's sake, for her own.

Mr. Porter had stopped too and was looking with eyes, quite as grave and thoughtful as Joan's, up at the old sign. "The Juniper Inn," he said slowly. He laid a hand gently on Joan's shoulder. "It has meant so much to that poor lad in yonder. Joan, lass, you're too young yet—you young folks—to realize what you've done for him, but the doctor's been telling me. He says if I could've seen his face that first day he saw him, and it's been such a home for that poor lonely old fellow. And he's going to get even with you all—that same old fellow is—he's going to show you what he can do; though he's quite willing to own, that it may not be in such charming fashion."

"Oh," Joan cried protestingly, "please don't—you'll make me run away."

"Well, I won't then, at present, I mean. Shall we continue our promenade? Excellent habit, these little promenades before retiring. At Hill View there are capital wide verandas. You've never been at Hill View?"

"I've never been—anywhere," Joan answered,

with a little laugh. "Hill View—why that's your home, isn't it—and where Cousin Robert used to live?"

"Yes. He left the old place to me, you know; I about lived there as a youngster—I hadn't any folks of my own. Uncle Robert Clayton was my guardian—his wife had been my mother's only sister. Bob and I were always mighty good chums—he was two years younger than I. Hill View's a fine old place. You'd like the house—big and square and colonial, you know. It's too big for a lonely old bachelor like myself; too empty—of living people; too full—of memories. That's the reason I've got into the habit of living in rooms in town—when I'm not trotting aimlessly about the country—and only running up now and then to see that the house is being kept up all right. I shouldn't like the old place to get run down, for the sake of old times. But a house like that ought to be filled with young folks and I—— Well, I told you, my dear, I'd been doing some day-dreaming. I used to do a deal of day-dreaming at one time of my life—right there at Hill View;" he was silent a moment or two, then he said, "but your mother has been at Hill View, my dear."

"Yes, indeed," Joan answered quickly; "she and papa stopped there on their wedding trip."

"I was in Europe then. She has told you about the place?"

"Oh, yes, and especially about that portrait on the landing—I mean the one of Audrey Clayton."

"Yes, I know—the one of Audrey Clayton—the old house is full of pictures of Audrey Clayton—for me. She was a year younger than Bob—what comrades we three were."

"I remember papa used to tell us about her. She was a young lady when he saw her last and he was still a schoolboy. He said she was the prettiest thing he had ever seen—that he just couldn't keep his eyes off her."

"Pretty! She was the toast for miles around, my dear—that portrait doesn't do her justice—and she was something better than pretty. Her room at Hill View is just as she left it—all pink hangings—she was very fond of pink. I reckon it's a bit faded now, but I've a fancy not to have them changed. It's a pleasant room, looking out over the garden. One of the windows had a big window seat—she used to sit there to

read and study—she had some of her lessons with us. Jack's been telling me about you three studying together and it took me back to old times."

"And you had fun over your lessons, like we all do?" Joan asked.

"That we did, and when we boys went away to school, well I can see Audrey standing there on the front steps now—determined not to cry. She'd on a pink dress of some kind of soft thin stuff, and she was swinging a big pink sunbonnet by one string—that's the way she usually wore her bonnets, 'spite of all Mammy Loo would say."

Joan seemed to see the little pink-gowned figure standing on the steps of the great white house.

"By the way," Mr. Porter said, coming to a sudden halt before the front door, "how about that treasure-closet—any of you found a fortune there yet?"

Joan smiled. "No, sir, I reckon we haven't any of us been looking there for one."

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Porter exclaimed. "How can you find a thing, if you don't look for it? Suppose you call that twin of yours—he's

the present head of the family—and we three'll institute a search right now."

Joan looked at him a moment in astonishment.

"I mean it," he repeated, with a nod of the head.

And Joan, a laugh in her eyes, went to tell Jack.

"Where have you been all this time?" Helen asked, looking up from the game of cards she and Theo, Jack and Mr. Nicols were playing.

"Out on the veranda with Mr. Porter; he asked me to walk with him. Can you spare Jack a few moments, please? Mr. Porter wants him too—in the 'long room.'"

"How mysterious!" Theo said; "I reckon you'll have to go, Jack. I wonder where Scott is; he might take your hand."

"Why, where is he?" Helen said. "I don't believe I've seen him since the children went to bed. He was telling them stories over there by the window."

"And the doctor," Joan asked, "he hasn't gone?"

"Some time ago," Theo told her; "he went off in a hurry. He hadn't thought it was so late and he went out the back way."

"Well, Jack and I'll be back in a few moments," Joan promised. "Come on, Jack."

"Let us go outside," Helen suggested to the others.

At the door of the "long room," Mr. Porter was waiting. "Come to think of it," he said, as the twins appeared, "you two won't need me and I think I'll say good-night. I'm a bit tired. Mind you make a thorough search."

"Oh, please," Joan began.

But Mr. Porter shook his head. "Good-night," he said, turning away; at the foot of the stairs he glanced back. "And good luck."

"What does he mean?" Jack asked, following Joan into the "long room."

"I don't exactly know, only that you and I are to investigate the treasure-closet."

"Investigate the treasure-closet! What nonsense!"

"I don't believe that it will prove—nonsense, Jack."

Jack drew a chair forward to the chimney place, and Joan jumping up opened the door of the little closet.

"I can't see," she began. "Oh, Jack, hand me a match, please."

"What do you expect to find, anyway—a pot o' gold?"

"I don't know," Joan answered, her head in the closet; then with a sudden exclamation she drew it out. "Jack, there *is* something in there! It looks like an envelope!"

"It isn't a long-lost will," Jack laughed, "for the simple reason that there never was any will lost in this family. Maybe it's a letter from the original proprietor of the Juniper Inn, telling where he buried his profits, if he had enough to bury, which doesn't seem very probable to me."

"Jack, don't laugh—just hand me up the poker. I can't reach in so far."

"Might wait for your arms to grow longer. Anticipation is so much more than realization."

"Jack, do give me that poker!"

"You promise to divvy up?" He held the poker just out of her reach.

"Jack, please! It *is* an envelope—a longish white one."

"Probably the O. P. (by which I mean original proprietor) has served some sort of a writ on us, for using his sign," Jack said, handing Joan the poker.

A moment of suspense, then Joan drew out

a long white envelope. "See!" she cried, jumping down beside Jack.

"What's that written on it?" Jack asked
"Oh, I say!" and he read aloud,

"John B. Clayton and Miss Joan B. Clayton,
"The Juniper Inn,
"Brentwick,
"Ga."

"Just to you and me," Joan said, wonderingly.
"What can it be?"

"We might open it and see," Jack suggested, with a nervous little laugh.

Standing by one of the small tables, they opened the envelope and spread out the sheet of paper it contained, reading it in breathless silence.

"This is to certify that I, John W. Porter, do hereby pledge to hold myself responsible for the coming true of certain day-dreams of Miss Joan Clayton, which include the college education of herself and her twin brother John Clayton, doing it in recognition of her courage and determination.

"And to this I set my hand and seal on this the eleventh day of April, in the year of grace, nineteen hundred and one, the same being the

sixteenth birthday of the said John and Joan Clayton.

“JOHN W. PORTER.

“The Juniper Inn,
“Brentwick, Ga.”

Jack gave a long low whistle, words quite failing him. Joan said nothing, staring down at the paper before them with eyes grown suddenly dim.

Then at last she turned, catching Jack's arm. “Come up-stairs—to mamma—perhaps she isn't asleep yet.”

Mrs. Clayton was not asleep; and presently she was sitting up in bed, a shawl about her, the wonderful paper in her hands, Jack holding a lighted candle beside her and Joan, leaning over the foot of the bed, flushed and tremulous, and with eyes wet and shining.

There was a mixture of expressions on the mother's face, as she read that short, direct statement, but surprise was not one of them. And seeing this, Joan asked eagerly, “Mamma, did you know?”

Mrs. Clayton laid the paper down. “Yes,” she said slowly, “I knew. Mr. Porter wrote me some time since from Florida, begging my

permission to accept this responsibility. He wrote, that while Cousin Robert had left him the property—for the sake of old times—at the last there had been an understanding between them that he, being without direct heir of his own, would look you young people up and, if it seemed best, would lend you a hand. So coming here, and finding you all working bravely and hopefully, and always with a certain end in view, he decided that the best possible way to carry out Cousin Robert's wishes would be to make possible, beyond a doubt, that college education which we-all are so sure Jack must have; and because Jack's twin had the same desire and because she had been—well, rather brave and plucky—he also decided to give her the same opportunities—always providing that I would give my consent. I talked it over with the doctor and decided after serious deliberation to accept for”—she smiled down at Joan—“you both. And then Mr. Porter wrote asking me to let him tell you in his own time and way, which naturally I was very willing to do.”

“And an exceedingly jolly time and way it was,” Jack said. “Wasn't it, old Coal?”

Joan's hands went to her hair, brushing it back.

"I simply can't realize it."

"You've considerable time ahead of you to get used to the idea in," Jack said. "It is a bit unrealizable, I admit."

"And to think," Joan said, "that now we-all can plan all we like, without having to put in those dreadful 'ifs.'"

"And the best part of it all is," Jack supplemented, "that now we can always plan for two."

And out on the landing—for Mrs. Clayton sent them away then—he suddenly turned, taking Joan by the shoulders. "And it's all 'in recognition of——'" he began.

Joan put a hand over his mouth, but he pulled it away. "Don't you suppose, my lady, that I too have recognized that same 'courage and determination' all this time? Joan, the old fellow's a brick, but he was the brickiest kind of a brick to put that clause in."

"Don't"—Joan begged. "Jack, we *must* go down-stairs. Do you remember that we've got company? What will they think of us?"

"I don't remember anything—only that you and I are going to college one of these days. We

ought to be ready in a couple of years, hadn't we? Shall it be a co-ed college, Joan?"

"Perhaps, we'll have to decide that later. Now we must go down."

"'There was a sound of revelry by night,'" Jack quoted, as a clink of glasses reached them from the dining-room.

"We-all've wondered and wondered where you were," Theo said, as they went in; "and we became so excited trying to guess the mystery, that we got ever so thirsty. Mr. Nicols, Jack'll squeeze those lemons."

Jack waved the paper over his head. "Please, mayn't I squeeze something more responsive than a lemon? Listen, you people!"

"Jack, don't read it all aloud!" Joan cried. "Just tell them ——"

Jack put out a protesting hand. "I shall read it very much aloud, taking particular pains to especially emphasize a certain clause. Moreover, they will be allowed individually, or collectively, or both to re-read it for themselves. After that, we will see about having it framed."

Whereat Joan vanished into the pantry, ostensibly after some sugar; but followed immediately by the whole party, headed by Jack, who

promptly mounted guard before one door of escape, motioning to Theo to do the same at the other.

"Now," Jack announced, "you shall all hear this wonderful statement. Joan, you've got a beautiful color. I only hope it isn't fever."

"Do go on," Theo implored; "I'm nearly wild with curiosity."

And Jack did go on—all fun and nonsense gone from voice and manner.

And it was actually Mr. Nicols who broke the short silence following the reading of Mr. Porter's promise. "Three cheers for Mr. Porter," he cried in tones that did not lack enthusiasm, though they were subdued. "And now, three for 'our co-ed' and three for 'our co-ed's' twin brother!"

They were all given.

"To think," Theo said, fanning herself with a napkin, "that I quite insisted on Jack's sending the blessed man away that first day!"

"Look here, Jack," Scott said, "let's choose the same college, then we can room together, and you'll keep me up to the necessary grind, and I'll see that you don't study yourself into an early grave."

"And you look here, Joan," Helen cried, "I believe I'll have to go to college too and we'll room together and so forth."

"Well, bless my soul!" and they all turned to find the Hon. Robert, in dressing gown and slippers, standing in the open doorway behind Jack.

"I heard a most t'rific noise, and I was 'fraid Margie might wake up and be frightened," he explained, "so I thought I'd better come down and 'vestigate."

"Well, I like that!" Theo exclaimed.

But suddenly Joan made a rush at Bob. "After all," she cried, "it's really you we-all have to thank, Bob Clayton!"

Bob smiled pleasantly, not comprehending in the least what Joan meant, but feeling quite sure that she was right.

"You'll make him more top-heavy than ever, if you talk to him like that, Joan," Jack warned.

"S'pose we-all 'journ to the dining-room and have our lemonade," Bob moved.

"Well, I like that!" Theo said again.

"Oh," Joan cried, as Jack filled the glasses, "was there ever such a birthday!"

"Never," Jack said; "you see the advantage

now of being a twin. I consider you a most fortunate young woman."

"And what do you consider yourself, please?"

"I am not considering myself—at present," Jack retorted, passing Helen the cookies.

"At any rate," Joan said seriously, "it doesn't seem as if there could be anything more added to this perfectly beautiful day."

But there was to be one thing more, one finishing touch, to make this most wonderful of days even more wonderful.

They had finished their lemonade and Joan, feeling that she must get away by herself for a moment or two of perfect quiet, had slipped out into the still cool garden. She was walking slowly back and forth between the roses, telling herself that Jack was to have his chance; that now there need be no break in the long line, when Scott came down the steps toward her.

He had been rather quiet during this last half hour of merriment and rejoicing. Joan had noticed it, though she felt sure it was from no lack of sympathy; and as he came toward her now, it seemed to the girl that somehow he had grown suddenly older, more manly.

"Joan," he said, speaking very quietly, "I

think you will like to know, that I sent a message to my mother after we got back from the island this afternoon. Not a long message, only two words, in fact—perhaps, you can guess them ?”

“Servabo Fidem ?” Joan said softly.

“Servabo Fidem,” the boy repeated ; “and I signed them—Scott *Monroe*.”

Joan’s eyes showed very deep and dark in the moonlight. “And I said just now, that there couldn’t be anything more.” She held out her hand. “Oh, you must know, how glad I am—how glad we will all be, but,” she smiled, though her lips were quivering—“I am not a bit—surprised.”

“Aren’t you ?” Scott’s voice was not very steady. “I am. My mother will thank you, Joan, and I do from my heart—truly it was more than the hand of welcome you gave me that day—have been giving me ever since. Yes, you must let me say this, just this once. And it’s to be ‘sooner’—you were right.”

“Tuesday night ?” Joan asked.

“Tuesday night. I wish I could leave Nicols behind me. I reckon he will be wishing it himself.”

"I'm glad," Joan repeated, "and I'm sorry. I don't know how we-all can go on with the Juniper Inn without you—and you'll come down again after awhile—perhaps, another winter?"

"If not before, but I imagine by then there won't be any Juniper Inn."

"There will always be one for you," Joan answered. "Have you—told Helen yet?"

"I'm going to now. I had to tell you—first of all."

CHAPTER XIX

GOOD-BYE

MR. PORTER, taking his constitutional before breakfast on the front veranda the next morning, felt a hand slipped through his arm. "You can't run away now, sir," Joan said; "you've got to stay and be properly thanked—or, I mean, let us try to thank you. Jack's coming too."

"So," Mr. Porter smiled down at the two young faces, "so that little exploring expedition last night panned out fairly satisfactory, after all."

"We certainly struck pay dirt, sir," Jack said.

"But I don't know what we-all ever can do to thank you," Joan added.

"I do," Mr. Porter's eyes twinkled; "I've a little scheme on hand, a capital little scheme. May I reckon on two friends at court, when the time for discussing it comes up? You see, how unscrupulous I am."

"Joan ought to sympathize with you," Jack laughed; "a more arrant young bribist never lived."

"I am counting much on Joan's sympathy," Mr. Porter's voice was most suggestive.

Joan looked up quickly. "I'm wondering," she said slowly, "if it is such a very *little* scheme. I'm rather inclined to think it quite a big one."

"Why what do you know about it?" Jack asked, in surprise.

"Nothing—excepting that putting two and two together ——"

"I thought you strongly objected to putting two and two together and having it make four," Jack said.

"In this case," Mr. Porter remarked, "it would make ——"

"How much, please?" Joan asked eagerly.

"How about *six*?"

She looked relieved. "I was afraid," she said to Jack, as they went indoors together, "that it might be going to make two, in his calculations."

"What are you talking about?"

"You and I—we're two, aren't we?"

"I'm muddled enough for six," Jack answered.

"Six is nicer than two, isn't it?"

"Doesn't that depend entirely on what the *six* is?"

"Persons, of course."

"I don't see the 'of course.' Then it depends on—who."

"Oh, they belong to the 'good, better, best' ones."

Jack looked thoroughly bewildered. "I don't ——" he began.

"Good-morning," Scott said, coming out of his room. "What are you two cogitating over so earnestly?"

"Good-morning," the twins answered, Joan adding, "Jack's trying to see how two and two put together can make six."

Scott looked puzzled. "Is it a riddle?"

"Riddles before breakfast!" Joan exclaimed. "I thought you had a better opinion of us than that."

"The worse the time, the worse the deed?" Scott asked.

"It's worse than a riddle. It's one of Joan's little mysteries," Jack explained; "she's made some sort of a discovery—and she's reducing my gray matter to nothingness trying to keep up with her suggestions. And the worst of it is, Mr. Porter's been upholding her in it."

"And the worst of it is," Joan said, "that he expects me to uphold him."

"There, you see," Jack turned to Scott, "that's the sort of thing she's been hurling at me for the last fifteen minutes. Talk of riddles before breakfast!"

"Never you mind," Joan said, "you'll understand some day. I suppose large minds, like large bodies, move slowly."

"Oh, go on," Jack told her; "go right on!"

"I'm going," Joan laughed, and she ran away. At the door of the dining-room, she looked back. "And it won't be very long either before you'll understand. I wonder if you'll approve?"

Scott went through to the back veranda. "Halloa," he said, catching sight of Bob sitting on the upper step, whittling industriously, "got a new knife?"

"Not—not 'xactly. Jack, he said he didn't like to feel 'sponsible for such an extra nice sort of knife all the time, and he said, 't seemed to him it was big 'nough knife to go shares on—so he said if it was 'gree'ble to me, he'd keep it from eight in the evening to eight in the morning; and I'd keep it from eight in the morning 'til eight in the evening, and if anything happened to it while he had it, I mustn't kick; and

if anything happened to it while I had it, he wouldn't kick."

"And a mighty sensible arrangement," Scott commented.

"Jack is real sens'ble—at times," Bob responded. "I'm very glad, on 'count of Margie, that he pr'posed this little 'rangement. I was making her a lot of furn'ture for her dolls' house. That's one reason I 'greed so quickly and anyway, saying 'no' to people sometimes hurts their feelings."

"So it does," Scott agreed.

Helen came out then, looking as fresh and smiling as the April morning—with a truly April hint of showers past. And breakfast being ready Bob ran to summon Mr. Porter, and they all went into the breakfast-room.

Mrs. Clayton was down, which seemed, as Jack said, almost too good to be true. "But you're getting better every day, aren't you, mater?" he asked.

"All she needs now is a change of air—and scene," Mr. Porter remarked with a briskness that made Joan look at him very earnestly for a moment or two.

"That's what the doctor says," Theo said

gravely. "Well, maybe we'll be able to manage it—somehow."

"I shouldn't wonder at it one bit," Mr. Porter assured her, and this time meeting Joan's quick glance he smiled.

Breakfast over, Helen followed Joan into the "long room." "So that is the treasure closet?" she said, looking up at the little cupboard.

"Didn't we name it well?" Joan said, pausing, dust-brush in hand.

"Indeed, you did." Helen wandered over to the corner cupboard. "Wouldn't I have just loved being here, when you were getting this room ready that day."

"Would you have helped polish those tankards?" Jack asked, coming in, and he rubbed his arms involuntarily.

"Yes."

"No, you wouldn't," he answered; "because, after all, I don't believe I'd have let you."

"Well, I'd have helped in some way," Helen insisted. "Oh, dear, I begin to feel homesick already for the Juniper Inn. Do you know, I've never had a meal here in the 'long room'! I'll tell—no I won't—not yet——" she ran out of the room. "Scott," she called, "do come here—

right away," and on his obeying, she pulled him eagerly into his room.

Some time later, Tony, grinning broadly, went about delivering certain invitations, in which Miss Helen Monroe and her brother Scott requested the pleasure and so forth at a driving-party to be given the next afternoon, the same to be followed by supper at the Juniper Inn.

"Oh!" Margie cried blissfully, when Theo read her hers; "we-all can go, mayn't we, mamma?"

And Mrs. Clayton saying yes, Bob and Margie hurried to find Helen and to deliver their acceptances verbally, they being rather late for school as it was, Bob explained. "So there wouldn't be time for us to write them. Margie's awful slow 'bout writing, and I understand 'vitations should be 'cepted promptly."

"I'm ever so glad you both can go," Helen said; "and of course, you're coming to the supper afterward?"

"Cert'inly," Bob answered.

"*We-all*'ve been to supper in the 'long room,' a reg'lar ord'ry supper," Margie said; "that was the night Mr. Porter came."

"Come on," Bob called, "we'll be late."

Joan had finished dusting the "long room"

and was standing by one of the windows looking out into the grove. "Oh, Theo," she called, catching sight of her sister in the garden, "are you accepting with thanks, or declining with regrets?" she asked, as Theo came up.

"Accepting—it'll be fun, won't it?"

"And wasn't it nice, asking the children? Bob grew several inches while reading his invitation." Joan leaned against the window looking down at Theo. "Theo," she said suddenly, "the honest truth now, aren't you glad we started the Juniper Inn?"

Theo smiled slowly. "There have been compensations."

"If I thought a thing, I'd say so fair and square," Joan protested.

"Do you remember," Theo said, "saying you'd like to come here for a meal?"

"And have it at the table by this very window—I should think I did. How tired we were that afternoon and how hopeful."

"*You* were, you mean," Theo corrected. "I remember I was a perfect doubting Thomas."

"We haven't made our fortunes, certainly, but we've done pretty well—on the whole," Joan said thoughtfully; "and at any rate there's been

the comfort of feeling we were doing something."

"But, Joan, do you know, you talk as if it were all over and done with?" Theo said wonderingly.

"Somebody's going to be late for school," Scott said, coming to the door. "Then somebody'll get kept in."

Joan sprang up. Hurrying out into the hall she caught up her books and was out of doors and down the steps before him. "That somebody won't be me," she called back. "People don't get kept in on the last day of school," she added, as Scott caught up with her.

"I don't like 'last days,' do you?" he asked.

"Not of pleasant things. Scott, did you ever see anything like the way Helen's eyes shone this morning?"

"I wish she was going to stay down here longer," Scott said; "it is doing her such a lot of good."

"I know something that has done her a great deal more good."

"She was pleased when I told her," Scott commented. "She's been mighty nice about not bothering a fellow. Well, the mater's a bit happier this morning, too."

They had reached the old ballroom, and Scott halted on the threshold looking about the long, wide room, that had grown so familiar. "It'll be mighty hard," he said, "settling down to study again without you and Jack; and I won't have such a jolly place to work in again, looking out into such a daisy old garden. There's a good stretch of study-time ahead, too, before college itself comes."

"And you haven't decided yet what to go in for?" Joan asked.

"No—not yet; something where there'll be something doing. I wish I could chuck college altogether. It isn't going to be very easy now, but my mother's set her heart on it."

Joan had turned and was looking toward the house. Jack was coming down the steps, his crutch sounding tap tap on the wood. "It isn't going to be very easy for him—in some ways; I know he thinks of it, though he never says so—think of all he'll have to miss—of the college life and he isn't a bit of a grind—he loves fun and all that, as much as any other boy; but he never complains himself about—it, and I mustn't complain for him."

There surely was no complaining in Jack's

smile, as he reached them. "It's the schoolmaster who's late this morning," he said, "but as it's the first time and is likely to be the last, we won't be hard on him. Perhaps his grief at leaving two such promising pupils as Joan and myself has interfered with his wheeling."

"Here he comes now," Joan said; and a moment or two later Mr. Nicols rode into the yard. He was intercepted by Helen, invitation in hand; then he and Helen came down the path together.

"Everybody's accepted,—except Aunt Peggy," Helen cried; "and she will, as soon as she hears about it."

"Helen has Aunt Margaret beautifully trained," Scott remarked.

"Joan," Helen cried, "you're not going to have lessons to-day?"

"Of course she is," Scott answered; "we all are. Won't it be our last chance all together?"

No one regretted more than Mr. Nicols the breaking up of the little class. Lessons that day were prolonged far beyond the usual time and only brought to a close at all by the appearance of Bob, who remarked that if they were as hungry as he was, he reckoned they'd come to dinner.

"Dinner," Jack said, "it can't be dinner-time?"

"No, it isn't," Bob answered; "it's been dinner-time and gone, this ever so long."

"Five customers!" Helen announced gleefully, as they all gathered about the table. "We have been busy, haven't we, Theo? And Mr. Porter played clerk. It was such fun!"

"And while our guests kindly helped to wait on our customers," Jack observed; "we—the originator of this wild scheme, and the head clerk—have been following the paths of wisdom, 'far from the madding crowd.' I begin to suspect Joan and myself of being rather cute."

"Judging from Helen's expression, it must have been a gladdening crowd," Joan suggested.

"Two of them were only walkers," Helen said.

"Not even Tony himself could speak more scornfully," Jack laughed.

After dinner, Helen, Scott and Mr. Nicols rode over to the hotel; it being quite time Miss Clarke had her invitation, Helen decided.

It was rather a busy afternoon. "I think," Joan said to Mr. Porter, just before supper, "that you must bring us good luck. We always seem to be busier when you are here."

"That isn't such good luck for me," he answered. "So your boarder leaves on Tuesday?"

"Yes," Joan said soberly, "we-all are going to miss him dreadfully; he's been here about four months."

"He's a nice fellow," Mr. Porter said, heartily; "and that sister of his is a mighty fine girl."

"Isn't she!" Joan agreed warmly. "I never have had many girl friends. We live so far out from town and I've always had Theo and then there was Jack. I suppose, being a twin, I didn't seem to care about having friends, when I had Jack. Of course I knew girls at school, but I never got intimate with them. Helen, I took to right away; I think we shall always be friends and I reckon, if we could, we'd be mighty chummy."

"She's a mighty fine girl," Mr. Porter repeated. "Some day they must come to Hill View." He looked at Joan, a twinkle in his eyes.

The next morning Mr. Porter left for Atlanta for a few days. "I'll be back by Thursday night," he told Mrs. Clayton. "By that time that special meeting ought to have been held."

"What meeting?" Theo asked.

"Oh, a special meeting of the stockholders of the Juniper Inn," he told her.

"What does he mean, mamma?" Theo asked, as Mr. Porter drove off. "Joan, you look as if you knew—something."

"That's getting to be Joan's chronic expression nowadays," Jack declared.

"I don't *know* anything——" Joan began.

"Nicols would feel flattered, after all his well-meant efforts," Jack laughed.

"I mean about——"

"Not even that two and two make six, or, will make it?" Jack asked.

"What are you two driving at?" Theo exclaimed. "And, mamma, you haven't answered my question."

"I will—on Wednesday," Mrs. Clayton said. "I mean to call a family council on Wednesday morning."

"That 'special meeting'?" Jack asked.

"If you like to call it so," his mother answered. "Now, no more questions until then."

"What can it all be about?" Theo said, as she and Joan went up-stairs together.

"It might be about several things—new china

for the Juniper Inn, for instance," Joan answered. "We need some, don't we?"

"It might be—but it isn't! Mr. Porter would be likely, wouldn't he, to take an interest in china for the inn."

"He takes a good deal of interest in the inn."

"Not in its china closet; he hasn't got beyond the closets of the 'long room' yet," Theo said.

"Wasn't that the dearest thing—one could agree to most anything, after that. Theo, what are you going to wear this afternoon?"

"My white *piqué*."

"I believe I will, too."

"Oh, no, you won't," Theo laughed. "I strongly protest."

Joan laughed too. "I believe I will wear *my* white *piqué*, then. Does that suit you any better?"

"It's a good bit nearer the truth," Theo answered.

Promptly at three o'clock Bob's shout proclaimed the arrival of the bus and party from the hotel.

"Nine of us," Mr. Nicols remarked, when they were all in. "Why, just the number of the muses."

"So we must all try to be extra amusing," Helen remarked.

"See here," Scott exclaimed, "if that's the sort of thing you intend springing on us this afternoon, we'll leave you at home."

Helen promised not to do it any more. "But it was really Mr. Nicols' fault," she added.

"Well, he got his 'come-uppance,'" Jack said.

Margie, sitting between Miss Clarke and Theo, scrutinized Mr. Nicols wonderingly. "What's 'come-uppance'?" she asked.

"Having to stand in the corner for not knowing your lessons," Jack explained.

"But Mr. Nicols wasn't saying lessons and he isn't standing in a corner now; he's sitting op'site Theo."

"I am sure you never have to stand in the corner for not knowing your lessons," Mr. Nicols said.

"No, sir," Margie answered soberly; "but B——"

"It's lots of fun, isn't it, riding in a bus?" Bob interposed hastily, with face grown suddenly red.

"Heaps," Scott agreed, his eyes twinkling.

"And this is a 'xtremely com'table bus," Bob went on; "the most com'table I was ever in."

"Have you been in many?" Miss Clarke asked politely.

Bob hesitated. "N-none, 'cept this."

It was six o'clock when the bus drew up again before the Juniper Inn. According to previous instructions, Tony met the party at the door, ushering them into the "long room," placing chairs, and taking orders with a gravity delightful to behold.

"Tony acts just like he didn't really know us," Margie said.

"And you will all please observe," Jack remarked, "that he hasn't on his 'walkers' manners; it *would* have been most mortifying to be treated as if we were 'only walkers.'"

Nannie had entered heartily into the spirit of the occasion, and the supper she sent in was fully worthy of the Juniper Inn.

It was a very jolly affair and fortunately—in one way—there were no strangers present.

"I knew I should enjoy a meal here," Joan said, glancing across from her table, that very table by the window looking out into the grove, to the one where Theo sat.

"You have a trick of knowing what you want," Theo answered, "and of getting it, too," she added.

"We enjoyed our first meal in this room, didn't we, Nicols?" Scott asked.

"We certainly did. It is hard to realize we have been down here so long."

"Harder yet," Scott laughed, "to realize that pretty soon we won't be down here."

After supper they went into the parlor, where Mrs. Clayton was reading. She looked up with a smile, laying aside her book. "I think it would be quite superfluous to ask whether you have all had a good time," she said.

"I've had a scrumptious time," Joan answered, taking off her hat.

"So say we all of us," Scott added.

"And now, we wanted to ask, madam," Jack remarked, "whether some of us might be able to get accommodations here for the night?"

"As a rule, we do not accommodate strangers for the night," Mrs. Clayton answered; "and the head clerk, being absent ——"

"Perhaps he will be in before long," Jack suggested; "then we may be able to make arrange-

ments. I understand that he is a most obliging, good-natured fellow."

"There's one thing certain," Scott said, "he isn't half as good-natured as his assistant."

"Then we-all will tackle the assistant," Jack laughed.

"And there's another thing equally certain," Scott added, "and that is that I'm going to miss old Nannie dreadfully. I'm not sure there won't be a case of kidnapping 'round here—say about Tuesday."

"And may I be there to see!" Joan cried; "Nannie's a good handful."

"Scott's getting sentimental," Jack said. "Shall we have some music?" And wheeling round on the piano stool, he struck lightly into the tune of "My Old Kentucky Home."

The others promptly took up the words and then other songs followed, ending at last with "Auld Lang Syne."

"Somehow," Scott said, coming over to the window-seat where Joan was sitting, "I feel as if this were our real good-bye to the Juniper Inn."

She looked up quickly. "Do you know, I was just thinking—it is as if we-all had been saying good-bye to it, too."

CHAPTER XX

A FAMILY COUNCIL

"Now," Theo leaned back in her chair, "we are all here, mamma, and all ready!"

Mrs. Clayton looked from one to another of the little group gathered about her. "Yes," she said, "you look ready."

Wednesday morning had come, and with it the time for that "special meeting."

"And mind you," Jack turned quickly to Joan, "if this mystery of yours fails to come up to the scratch, after all your hints and insinuations, there'll be—trouble."

"But I haven't any mystery," Joan declared.

"Hush!" Bob exclaimed reprovingly. "This is a s'rious 'casion!"

"Bob's quite right this time," Mrs. Clayton said, with a smile; "it's a *very* serious occasion. Mr. Porter has invited us all to make him a visit—a long visit—at Hill View. He has been very urgent and has advanced so many good reasons for our accepting that it is rather hard to find

any for refusing. In point of fact, it will mean our closing the house here for an indefinite time, probably two or three years, or until Jack and Joan are ready for college. There is an excellent preparatory school near Hill View. Then Dr. Burley insists that the more bracing climate will prove highly beneficial, not only to me, but to you all. Of course, we should not stay at Hill View longer than the summer, but would find a house in the vicinity. But the summer, at any rate, Mr. Porter insists upon. He has taken a strong liking to you all, and has set his heart on having the old place gay again with young people."

"Oh, mamma!" Theo's eyes were glowing.

"Do you see now," Joan faced suddenly round on Jack, "how putting two and two together made—six?"

"Please, mamma," Margie asked anxiously, "could Chevalier go?"

"I think he could, dear."

"I tell you-all," Bob smiled benignantly upon them all, "my friend Porter knows how to do a thing up handsomely."

"Jack, why don't you say something?" Theo cried.

"Waiting for the chance. Mater, what do you think?"

Mrs. Clayton's smile was a little grave. "I think a good many things. For one, it would solve the rather perplexing problem of getting you two young enthusiasts ready for college; it would mean a gayer, fuller life for Theo; it would mean good schools for the children; it would mean a long, care-free summer for you older ones—Hill View is a beautiful place—but it would mean as well, the breaking up of the old home."

All the eager young faces sobered instantly, and for a moment no one spoke, then Bob said slowly, "It's a dreadful 'spons'bil'ty, isn't it, deciding such matters?"

Mrs. Clayton patted the serious childish face. "Yes," she said, "it is."

"But we-all would come back here again, mamma?" Margie asked. "It wouldn't be for always."

"Certainly it wouldn't be for always, dear. After we have packed Jack and Joan off to college the rest of us will come back here again."

"And I'll be clerk of the inn then—won't I, mamma?" Bob asked.

"There won't be any inn then, Bob. I rather think the Juniper Inn has about run its course, in any event."

"Whether we-all go, or stay?" Joan questioned.

"Yes, dear."

Joan sighed. "It's been a short enough course."

"Oh, not *short* enough," Theo exclaimed; and they all laughed.

"Short but successful—that's not a bad career—even for an inn," Jack said comfortably.

"And I think," Mrs. Clayton said, "that we-all ought to extend a vote of thanks to its founder. It was a mighty plucky thing, Joan, and while the rest have done bravely, I honestly think you should have first mention."

"Please don't," Joan's face was crimson.

"You can't get out of it that way," Jack declared. "Go on, mamma, pile it on good and thick."

"Theo has been lots braver—because she hated it all the time."

"You all deserve a great deal of praise and, perhaps, a small amount of blame, for undertak-

ing such a thing on your own responsibility," Mrs. Clayton said soberly.

"And the 'college money' will come in somewhere, even if we-all won't need it just for Jack's college expenses?" Joan said.

"I should think it would," Theo declared; "there's a lot of studying to be done, before either of you'll be ready and that means books and there'll be other expenses. But it seems to me, we've got a good way from Hill View."

"We-all will be getting nearer to it every day, now, I reckon," Jack said. "Don't you think so, mamma?"

"What do you think?" Mrs. Clayton glanced from one to another of the three older ones.

"As if there could have been any doubt from the first!" Theo laughed. "Why, it seems too good to come true! And only last night, when we were seeing Scott and the others off, it seemed to me as if we-all must go somewhere too and the summer stretched ahead so long and hot, and Brentwick is so dull!"

"It strikes me," Jack said, "as not being a question of *whether* we will go—but *when* will we go. To think of a joyous clerkless existence.

Joan, won't we just pitch in and study this summer ! ”

“ No, you won't, ” Theo protested. “ We-all are going in for pomps and vanities for one while. I understand now, why Mr. Porter—that man ought to be canonized—kept dwelling the other day upon the number and charm of the young people near Hill View ; and of what good times they had together. ”

“ Theo's in the right of it, ” Mrs. Clayton said, “ as to the studying, Jack. I've no objection to your doing a little every day, but there must be plenty of play as well. ”

“ Jack makes a play of study, ” Joan said.

“ And a study of play ? ” Theo asked.

Joan shook her head energetically. “ You know he doesn't do that. Don't you fear—you and mamma—Jack and I won't need any coaxing, when there's any fun around. ”

“ There won't be any lack of it this summer, ” Mrs. Clayton told her. “ Mr. Porter says you girls must bring riding habits, whatever else you bring. ”

Joan's eyes danced. “ There, Jack ! ”

“ And there's a ballroom at Hill View, ” Theo said.

“ So there is here, ” Jack laughed.

"And that one isn't going to be turned into a schoolroom," Theo declared. "Joan, if you hadn't set your heart on going off to college, what good times we might have. Now you'll be at school for years and years."

"Oh, she'll get through before she's quite threescore and ten," Jack said consolingly. "Your sister has chosen the path of knowledge, why seek to dissuade her?"

"I'm not," Theo answered; "I never attempt the impossible."

"Mamma," Joan asked, "shall we close the house here?"

"Dr. Burley thinks we would better try to rent it."

"Not furnished!"

"Joan is thinking of our dressing-table," Theo laughed.

"I think we will store the things we value most," Mrs. Clayton answered; "some of them can be shipped to us later."

"The books, of course," Jack said; "that is, all we do not take with us."

"Now see here, Jack," Theo protested, "do you suppose we-all are going to carry a whole library with us?"

"Not a *whole* one," Jack said regretfully.

"I believe you'd like to put nothing else in the trunks," Theo declared.

"I suppose we would have to put in a few necessities, but we can squeeze in a lot of books here and there. I'll show you."

"Indeed you won't!" Theo laughed.

"You shall have a box—not too large a one—for your books, Jack," his mother said. "You can sort out what you want the most."

"I shan't bother with many," Bob observed. "I've been studying pretty hard lately and I reckon I'd better take it sort of easy for awhile."

"You do look as if you needed a good rest," Jack said gravely. "I wouldn't be surprised though, if Miss Hallie needed one even more."

"Poor Miss Hallie," Margie said, "she's going to miss Bob and me a lot. She says Bob's better'n a tonic to keep her spirits up."

"I like Miss Hallie, only I don't always 'prove of her me-methods," Bob said slowly. "Shall we-all take Tony with us, mamma?" he added.

Mrs. Clayton smiled. "As I intend to take Nannie, and as Nannie is pretty likely to take Tony, it looks as though we would still have him with us."

"So we-all shall travel with quite an establishment," Jack remarked; "ladies' maid, valet ——"

"Cust'mers, Miss Joan!" Tony announced from the hall.

Joan sprang up. "To think the day should have come when a customer would be inopportune."

"In my humble opinion it came long ago," Theo said; "about the time a certain sign made its '*inopportune*' appearance."

"And oh, please, don't settle quite everything before I get back," Joan implored.

"Mamma," Theo asked, "hadn't that sign better come down at once? We-all are going to be too busy to bother with customers."

"When I come back I'll tell you how ungrateful you are, Theo," Joan flashed at her from the doorway.

By the time the tray was ready—the customer being merely a "walker" and "luncher"—another party had appeared and Joan was kept busy from then on until nearly dinner-time.

"We-all are going out with a fine flare," Jack said, as the last guest paid his bill and rode away.

Joan came to perch on his table. "You'll be out of a position soon."

"But with a good recommendation?"

Joan puckered her forehead. "I'm not quite sure about that. As a twin and brother you are eminently satisfactory; as a clerk of a tavern you are—less so."

"And as I shall not be looking for a position as twin and brother, perhaps I had better give up any thoughts I may have been secretly cherishing as to the other position."

"Perhaps you had. You are perfectly honest, you know, and all that."

"Thanks, awfully," Jack murmured.

"But sometimes it has seemed to me that possibly you were more fitted for something else."

"Polishing tankards?" Jack asked.

Joan glanced toward the "long room." "You surely did polish them beautifully——"

"And my arms surely ached beautifully. Joan, you never did buy me that liniment."

"And oh, Jack!" Joan cried, "how little we all thought that day what the Juniper Inn was going to bring us. It's too unrealizable. And won't we have the loveliest summer that ever was."

And the change will do mamma so much good. I suppose," she sobered quickly, "Theo'll be getting to be a 'grown up' now—won't she?"

"I dare say—but *you* needn't indulge in any such foolishness."

"Mayn't I even turn my hair up, just in the braid, with a big black bow? I think you must say 'yes' to that, Jack. Why, I'm going to college and I'm sixteen! And, Jack, tell me, did you-all talk over things much, after I came down-stairs?"

"Not to amount to much. The mater and Theo were veering round fast to the subject of clothes, so I fled. The last I saw of Theo she was shoulders deep—beginning from her head I mean—in a big chest."

Joan clapped her hands softly. "Isn't it exciting? Going away means clothes—new, pretty ones—and all sorts of delightful things."

"Upon my word," Jack declared, "if you are not quite as frivolous as the next one."

"Certainly I am," Joan agreed.

"I did think I'd brought you up better."

"Did you?" Joan laughed. "Come on, let's go up-stairs."

"And discuss clothes? Not much! But we'll

go have a look at the books. It's going to be mighty hard, deciding what *not* to take."

Long low bookcases lined two sides of the parlor, and in the deep closet off of it were more books, brought there when the "long room" had been turned into the tavern dining-room.

Most of the volumes were old—some very rare. "What we don't take, must be packed ready for shipping, if necessary," Jack said, sitting down on the floor before one of the cases.

"That'll keep you busy one while," Joan answered.

Jack was busily pulling book after book from its place, piling them beside him. "It will take a bit of time, but it won't be really work. I wonder where we-all will be reading these next?"

"Isn't it odd to think of packing up and going away to live?" Joan said; "odd and delightful. There are beautiful grounds at Hill View, so I dare say you'll do a lot of reading out of doors."

"Dinner," Theo came to tell them. "Dear me, so you're beginning already?"

"Just taking a preliminary survey of the books. One can't choose all at once."

"I'm afraid if you have many such surveys you'll end by choosing all," Theo answered.

At the dinner-table the talk was all of this new plan, Margie starting it as soon as they were all helped by asking how soon they were to go.

"Very soon, dear," her mother replied. "Mr. Porter is anxious to have us go with him when he returns; but I really do not think we can get ready in a week."

"A week!" Jack exclaimed. "Why, that's lots of time. I can get the books packed in a day or two."

"There happens to be something else to pack besides books," Theo told him. "Still, mamma, it needn't take very long to get the things ready for storing—then there'll be our packing. We'd better leave all the sewing we can to do after we get there. You know the sooner you get away the better."

"And it would be nice traveling with Mr. Porter," Joan said; "we-all wouldn't have to think about trains and routes and all that then. So let's rush all we can. And you know it's going to be perfectly heart-breaking—once the sign's down—seeing all the poor, disappointed, hungry people coming riding, or walking, up full of anticipation and ride, or walk away again filled with despair."

"I don't believe mamma had thought of that side of it," Theo said.

"We-all must keep carefully to the back of the house," Jack added. "We don't want to travel mere broken-hearted wrecks. It would be too hard on Mr. Porter."

"I'm going to pack this afternoon," Margie announced, "after I've finished ironing my dolls' things. I washed them out this morning."

"So that's what made you such a damp-looking maiden," Jack said; "and here I've been thinking all this time that you'd been crying over leaving the home of your childhood."

"Truly?" Margie looked concerned.

"How many dolls do you take with you?" Jack hurried to ask.

Margie opened her brown eyes very wide. "Why all of them, of course. Isn't mamma going to take us all?"

"Quite an unanswerable argument," Mrs. Clayton said, with a smile.

"And they haven't any of them ever been away from home, poor dears," Margie said, pityingly.

"Travel is a great broad'ner of the mind," Bob remarked, sententiously.

"See here, you young phonograph," Jack protested, "if you will quote wholesale from your defenseless friends, you should be compelled by law to give your authorities."

"But Bob's quotations are so unfailingly quotations of manner, as well as matter," Joan said; "as if any one wouldn't know that was one of Mr. Nicols' speeches."

"Almost I see before me that 'grave and reverend signor,'" Jack said. "Never again shall I have a tutor so satisfactory."

"One comfort about going away, we shan't be so lonesome," Joan remarked. "And Mr. Porter said something about Scott and Helen coming to Hill View—wouldn't that be just splendid?"

"And now," Theo asked, as chairs were pushed back, "what shall we do first?"

"Oh, we-all know what you are getting at!" Joan cried. "It's easy to read it in your eye."

"Joan is very good at reading a—sign," Jack said.

Mrs. Clayton smiled across at Joan. "It's got to come, you know, dear," she said.

"Or rather go," Jack amended.

"Let us devoutly hope to stay—this time," Theo finished.

"So I think," Mrs. Clayton went on, "that we'll have Tony bring the ladder 'round right now."

"Oh," Bob sprang up, "are you-all talking about taking the sign down *now*?"

"Now it is, sir," Jack answered.

"But we-all won't be going away for ever so long, maybe a whole week. We might have a lot of cust'mers in a week—cust'mers are such fun."

"There won't be time to look after them, Bob," Theo explained.

"It's quite time, dear, that the sign came down," his mother added; "it's been up a long while—too long as it is."

"I'll help take it down, then," Bob said. "I helped Tony put it up."

"We-all know you did, you young reprobate!" Jack declared.

"Well, and I'm glad of it," Bob insisted. "I consider it's been a 'mense success."

"And so are *we* glad, Bob," Joan told him. "We-all, 'specially Jack and I, owe you a lot of gratitude, and Jack's only joking—but you stand by your colors."

"Only before you begin to stand," Theo laughed, "suppose you go tell Tony mamma wants him to bring the long ladder 'round to the front. Joan, my dear, you can give little digs in my direction all you like, but you know you're glad the sign's coming down."

"I'm glad we-all are going away," Joan answered.

Then, while Bob ran to tell Tony, the rest went through to the front veranda.

"Behold," Jack waved an impressive hand, "how the sun's bright rays fall on those outstretched branches for the last time—fall gently, lovingly, as if they knew it was for—the last time!"

"Jack, you shan't make fun of it!" Joan exclaimed, sitting down on the steps and looking soberly up at the swinging sign. She was thinking of that day when she had first caught sight of it swinging there in the sunshine—of the sudden way out of their difficulties it had seemed to offer; thinking of all the busy days since; of that first dollar bill and how she had wondered indignantly over its appearance, and how she had longed to toss it to old Nannie; thinking of Scott's coming and all it had come to mean to

them and him; of that afternoon on the Shore road and then that afternoon on the beach, the day of her birthday, followed by that night in the garden.

Very deep and faraway had grown Joan's brown eyes when Bob's shouts brought her back with a start to the present; and the sight of Tony at the farther end of the long ladder he and Bob were bearing—a very sober Tony—drove all soberness from her face.

Tony disapproved quite as heartily of the taking down of the sign, as he had approved the putting of it up. He had not been given any inkling of the new plans, save the vaguest of references on Bob's part—and only the blankest, dullest of lives, in which there was no Juniper Inn, seemed to stretch ahead of him. Tony felt quite sure that in the dreary, uneventful days to come he should sigh longingly for even one of those despised "walkers."

"Cheer up, old fellow!" Jack told him, noting the gloom on Tony's round, black face. "This isn't the end, only the beginning of any amount of good times. Why, you're going to be quite a traveled young man—you're going clear up to old Virginia."

Tony from his place high up on the ladder looked down, his white teeth showing in a sudden smile. "That so—fo' sure, Marse Jack?"

"So—for sure."

Then Tony had a thought. "How 'bout gran'-mammy—be she goin'?"

"Yes, Nannie's going too," Mrs. Clayton assured him.

Tony's smile vanished. "'Pears like gran'-mammy too ole to go junketin' 'roun' de country."

"But if she didn't go who'd look after you?" Joan asked him.

"I reckon I'se 'bout ole enuff to look after mysel', Miss Joan. Gran'mammy, she's allers s'picionin' inter a feller's doin's. Marse Bob, you'd best get right down off dis yer ladder, 'tain't over steady."

"I'm coming up to help you," Bob objected.

"I ain't gwine need no help; 'pears like ev'ry one done think me a ninfant 'n arms," Tony answered shortly.

"Yes, get down, Bob," his mother said; "you shall help Tony carry the sign back to the shed for your part."

Then came a moment of waiting, followed by

a sharp grating noise, and Tony was coming slowly down the ladder again, the old sign in his arms.

As he stood it a moment against the side of the veranda, Joan bent to look at it more closely. "Somehow it has always seemed sort of real to me," she said slowly ; " not mere wood and paint. I wonder who first thought of the idea for a sign-board ? And to think how little Scott and Helen dream of what we are doing—very likely, at this moment, Helen is thinking how their train is taking them farther and farther from the Juniper Inn, and all the time, there isn't any Juniper Inn any longer. Why they are no farther off from it now than we-all are."

"It surely belongs to the past now," Theo agreed. "Already I'm wondering if we-all ever *did* keep a tavern—it doesn't seem possible."

"But after all, Joan," Jack said, "what stood for the Juniper Inn to Scott and the others—the real life here—is left."

"Going—going—gone !" Bob called, taking up his end of the sign. "Come on, Tony—I've got a heap to do and can't afford to waste any more time."

"Let me help !" Margie cried, running after.

“ ‘ And if forever, still forever, fare *thee* well ! ’ ”
Jack called after the retreating sign.

Joan slipped a hand through her mother's arm.
“ Come inside, mamma ; let's leave these idle scoffers.”

“ You can call me a scoffer all you like,” Theo said, coming in after them ; “ but you shan't call me an idle one. I intend to put that busy little bee quite in the shade.”

“ Sister Anne—sister Anne ! ” Jack called from the doorway. “ I see a cloud of dust, raised no doubt by would-be customers.”

“ Then do come inside,” Theo cried. “ No bite, nor sup, do they get here.”

“ How dreadfully cruel that sounds,” Jack said.

“ If they've been here before and have come back expecting to find the tavern, we-all will have to give them luncheon,” Joan declared.

“ Well let's wait and see,” Theo said.

From a safe distance inside the hall she and the twins watched the little group of riders slacken pace before the steps, halt a moment in evident consultation, their eyes raised to the place where the sign had hung, then with one or two backward glances ride slowly on.

"Bless their hearts," Theo said; "what intelligent, discerning creatures they were. One would be almost tempted to call them back and treat them beautifully—almost—not quite! It isn't the food, goodness knows, but it is so delightful to feel oneself free—to have retired into private life once more and to know one needn't drop whatever one is doing to make sandwiches for people one doesn't care two cents for."

"Poor Theo!" Joan laughed. "You have had to make a lot of sandwiches lately, while I've been having such good times down there in the schoolroom. And she should be a private lady, if she wanted to."

"Come on up-stairs," Theo suggested, "and take stock of our wardrobe. I want to begin on something, so I can really feel we're going away."

CHAPTER XXI

GOOD NEWS

"THERE, now, that's something like business!" Mr. Porter leaned forward in the hack in which he had driven over from the station to look up at the old house—signless now; inn no longer.

"It strikes me, sir," Jack said, coming forward to take his valise, "that it looks exactly the other way."

"Well, now, perhaps it does, from your point of view," Mr. Porter answered.

He and Jack went through to the back veranda, where the rest were all gathered, and where the warm welcome he received did, he declared, his heart good. "I begin to feel as if I had some 'folks' of my own," he said, settling comfortably back in a big wicker armchair.

"Are we-all your folks?" Margie asked, from the hammock where she was sewing with the most businesslike of airs.

"Why, I hope so," Mr. Porter answered. "How do you all feel about it?"

"Very cousinly and well disposed," Joan told him laughingly.

"Even though I am only a cousin of a cousin?"

"Even though."

He leaned forward scanning the little group. "Then suppose you begin calling me *cousin*—right now—Cousin John. Is it a bargain?"

"I'm perfec'ly 'gree'ble," Bob assured him gravely. "I've always felt 'sif Mr. Porter was entirely too formal for friends like us. I don't 'prove of too much cer'mony myself."

"As if you needed to tell any one that, Bob," his mother laughed. "However, as long as Cousin John has himself proposed the change you may be allowed so much of your beloved informality, only don't carry it too far, or there may be a reining in."

"And so your friends have gone?" Mr. Porter said; "I quite miss them."

"And so do we-all of us," Joan said.

"Yes, we miss them very much," Mrs. Clayton added. "They went Tuesday night. If it were not that we have all been very busy since, I am sure I should have had an exceedingly doleful set of young people on my hands."

"I reckon they miss us, too," Bob observed.

"Scott thought a lot of us. I *knew* we-all would like having him for a boarder. I think boarders are very nice. I don't s'pose"—he looked up at Mr. Porter suddenly—"that there'll be any boarders at Hill View?"

"Robert!" his mother exclaimed.

Mr. Porter laughed. "There never have been any. I think probably, sooner or later, we shall have—say one or two ex-boarders there. And so," he looked about him smilingly, "that little 'special meeting' came off all right and you are going to be very good to me and give me my way."

"It seems to me as if it were you who was going to be very good to us," Theo said.

"And you are going to Hill View. I am unspeakably delighted," Mr. Porter said heartily.

"So are we-all," Joan laughed.

"Indeed we are," Mrs. Clayton said earnestly; "I am very glad to have these young folks of mine get a wider outlook on life. This is such a quiet corner down here."

"You shall see what gay youngsters they can be," Mr. Porter told her. "Now the important question is—how soon can you be ready?"

"Margie and me can be ready 'most any time,"

Bob announced briskly. "Margie's got her packing all done. I helped her."

"That sounds encouraging," Mr. Porter declared.

"Margie's trunk, if it does have to carry six wardrobes, isn't exactly a Saratoga," Joan remarked. "I am afraid any really modern doll fresh from Paris would utterly scorn it. Cousin John, do you think you are going to have room at Hill View for six dolls, as well as six people?"

"Dear me—for sixty."

"Oh, please don't!" Theo implored. "We all have been trying so hard to impress upon Margie the beauties of moderation in regard to dolls. And our chief argument has been the probable lack of accommodation at Hill View."

Mr. Porter laughed. "You do not know Hill View. Come to think of it, there's the jolliest little playhouse down at the foot of the garden. We'll have to overhaul it at once."

"A playhouse—that's a really truly house—big enough for me and Bob to play in?" Margie was leaning against his knee instantly, looking up into his face with big intent brown eyes.

"A real house," Mr. Porter assured her; "parlor, bedroom, dining-room and kitchen—and a

real cooking stove, with real pots and pans—at least there used to be ; and if they've disappeared you and I'll have to go shopping together—won't we ? ”

“ Oh ! ” Margie gasped.

“ We'd best keep an eye on Margie now,” Jack suggested, “ else she'll be leaving for Hill View on an early train.”

“ Speaking of trains,” Mr. Porter said, “ brings us back to the question of—how soon ? ” he looked at Mrs. Clayton.

“ Not for two weeks—at the earliest, I am afraid,” she answered.

“ Two weeks ! ” Mr. Porter exclaimed.

Mrs. Clayton smiled. “ But there is a good deal to be done —— ”

“ Crating, storing, packing,” Theo added ; “ and some sewing.”

“ Well, I don't want to hurry you unreasonably,” Mr. Porter said. “ You are sure it must be two weeks ? ”

“ At the very least,” Mrs. Clayton answered. “ We shall be away so long, take it all in all—I really think we will do remarkably well if we get away then.”

Mr. Porter looked thoughtful. “ I tell you

what then, you are going to be too busy pulling things to pieces to have any one outside around, so I'll run up to Atlanta again and wait there for you, but if you don't show some signs of appearing there when the two weeks are up—back I come here after you."

"And you'll wait and go on up to Virginia with us?" Mrs. Clayton exclaimed. "That will be nice. We'll try not to keep you too long, and really there is no reason why you should not stay on here—if you will not mind the commotion."

But Mr. Porter, while promptly assuring her that he did not mind, still held to his own plan—it would be much more convenient for them, and there was a little business needing his attention in Atlanta.

"You can't imagine," he said to them later, as he bade them good-night, "how good it seems to me having Claytons again at Hill View. Those old darkies up there are going to welcome you all right; they think a lot of the old place. Really, they've been mighty good about tolerating me there; for after all, I'm not a Clayton, you know."

The next afternoon, just before leaving, Mr. Porter beckoned Joan into the "long room."

"My dear," he said, putting a key into her hand, "this belongs to the room which, if you don't mind, I've a fancy to have you occupy while at Hill View."

Joan took the key wonderingly; then she remembered, and with a swift gesture put her hand out, as if to return it.

Mr. Porter's smile was a little sad. "You've brown eyes," he said, "and Audrey's were blue; and your hair is dark, while hers was auburn; but all the same, you remind me strongly of Audrey Clayton. Perhaps it's that trick of yours of day-dreaming—she was mighty fond of day-dreaming—and I've a notion that she would like it, having a girl like you there in her room. She was very proud of her room—dreaming dreams and weaving fancies, as she used to do."

"And to know that that same girl's dearest dreams and wishes are to come true, thanks to you," Joan said softly. "Thank you very, very much for the key, Cousin John; I'll try to take good care of—everything."

And that night finding her mother alone in her own room, Joan showed her the key, and told her what Mr. Porter had said. "I almost wish he hadn't—in some ways," she said slowly; "it's

rather hard to think of really living in *that* room."

"That's exactly what he wants you to do, dear."

"Mamma," Joan spoke hesitatingly, "Cousin John was very fond of Cousin Audrey Clayton, wasn't he?"

"They were engaged, dear," Mrs. Clayton answered; "it was just a week before they were to be married that Audrey died."

Joan drew a deep breath. "And that was long, long ago?"

"Yes, dear."

"And he has never married; and mamma, he speaks of her as if he'd seen her—yesterday."

They were busy days that followed. The old house was rapidly losing its familiar, homelike look of comfort.

"Scott wouldn't know it now," Joan said one morning, standing in the middle of the dismantled parlor.

Jack glanced up from the box of books he was marking. "And to think it's only about a week since they went, and here are we in the midst of chaos."

"But it's fun—after all, isn't it?" Joan said.

"What it is leading to will be—fun; in itself, there isn't much fun about it."

"Oh, yes, there is," Joan insisted; "I know Helen would think so too."

"She happens to be a girl—like yourself."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything. A woman's sense of humor——"

Joan shook the tack-hammer at her twin. "Don't you go insinuating anything about a woman's sense of humor. It's developed quite far enough for her to see what funny things men are. I wonder what Helen and Scott are doing now?"

Letters had come from them both announcing their safe arrival in New York, their longing for the old inn, and there had come a letter from Mrs. Monroe as well, to Mrs. Clayton thanking her for her kindness to Scott and Helen.

"Wouldn't you love to go to New York, Jack?" Joan asked, sitting down on a big packing-box.

"I reckon we-all will, some day."

"Nothing seems impossible now, does it? Poor old Chevalier," Joan added, as the dog wandered in, a most disconsolate droop to both head and

tail. "How mournful he does act, Jack. I suppose he doesn't understand what we are up to."

"He ought to," Margie said, following in after Chevalier; "I'm sure I've been 'splaining to him all the morning—how's he going visiting 'way off to his Cousin John's—and how we-all are going—and 'bout riding in the cars—and how he's going in the baggage-car, like Jack said."

"Possibly he understands only too well," Jack suggested, "and is dreading the baggage-car."

The afternoon before they were to leave home, Joan ran out to the kitchen where Nannie was baking the thinnest of wafer-like cookies for the children to have on the journey.

"You've done yourself proud with these, Nannie," Joan said, taking one of the crisp spicy cakes, warm from the oven. "Our last cookies baked in this old kitchen for who knows how long. And they're not going to waste their fragrance on the desert air,—in other words, be set before customers."

Nannie tossed her turbaned head. "'Cordin' to my way o' tinkin', de bestest ting we Claytons can do is ter lose all r'membrance o' dose

cust'mers. Folkes as *is* folkes can do a lot o' tings what oder people cawn't—but dey ain't got no reason to go r'memb'ring, when dey gets de chance ter fergit."

"But you wouldn't want us to forget Master Scott and Mr. Nicols and Cousin John—they were all customers at first?"

Nannie chuckled. "Mighty likely ter fergit dem—ain't you-all, honey?"

"And," Joan continued, "maybe we-all wouldn't be going to Hill View at all, but for the inn."

Nannie cut her cookies impatiently. "'Sif the good Lawd done need dat foolish inn bus'ness to bring 'bout His doin's! Marse Porter, he's kin to you-all; or leastways he's kin ter *your* kin—co'se you-all an' him was bound ter come ter-gether sooner ner later."

"Well, we'll never know now," Joan said. "Anyhow, we-all are going to Hill View and you're coming with us. Cousin John particularly mentioned you, Nannie. That's the good of being such an all 'round body—whatever one intends doing one needs you. Mamma says she doesn't know which you do the better—nursing or cooking. You'll like it, won't you—waiting

on mamma and looking after the children for a while? And you've surely earned a rest. I don't know what we-all would have done without you. I reckon the Juniper Inn would have had a short life."

"An' hit oughter 've," Nannie observed; but she was smiling delightedly. "You go 'long, Mis' Joan—you hain't no call to cum flatt'ring dis yere ole woman so outragously. What's pesterin' me," she added, all her smiles fading, "is, whatever is Antonio gwine do up dere? He's never be'n out in de world hisse'f, Antonio hain't—an' he's gwine lose his head fo' shore."

"Oh, he'll be kept too busy to get into mischief," Joan answered reassuringly; "there'll be errands to run, and he can help about the stables, Cousin John says; then later, you know, we-all are going to housekeeping again and he can be our butler," she ended with a laugh.

"'Pears like you-all don't know Antonio, ef you-all tinks a little matter o' work 's gwine keep him outer mischief. One ting's sartain, Mis' Joan, I hain't gwine lose my hold on him, once we-all leaves this yere home 'til we lands safe at Hill View."

"Which doesn't promise a very pleasant trip

for Master Tony," Jack laughed, as Joan meeting him in the garden on her way back to the house, told him of Nannie's decision.

"Jack," Joan came to a standstill half way up the path, "I simply can't make it true that we-all are going away for so long;" she looked about the old garden a little wistfully. "I wish—almost—that Dr. Burley hadn't found us a tenant for the place. I believe I'd rather think of it as shut up, waiting for us to come back, than to have strangers here. I hope they'll be good to the flowers. Your roses and my violets. There'll never be any other violets as sweet as these."

"Yes, there will," Jack answered. "Come on, Joan. Theo and I have to go to town; and Tony'll have the rig ready before I am."

On the back steps they found Margie, blissfully surveying three large trunks strapped ready for the morrow; while in the hall beyond Theo was bending over a fourth.

"My trunk's in," Margie called gleefully; "and the dolls—all but Constance Evelyn—and she's ev'ry bit dressed. She's going with us, you know."

"Constance Evelyn!" Joan exclaimed; while

Theo, coming to the door, echoed in tones even more eloquent of dismay,

"Constance Evelyn! And Margie with five other dolls to choose from!"

For Constance Evelyn, reckoned from a doll's standpoint, was no longer young and reckoned from any standpoint, had never been beautiful. Large, bland, rag-doll from the top of her decidedly flat head to the end of her stubby feet, Constance Evelyn could boast of nothing fancy about her save her name. She was a family institution, having been loved and battered by all the children in turn.

Margie, her latest mother, lavished all the warmth of her loving little heart upon her; and Constance Evelyn, who had lived through more adventures and hair-breadth escapes than any hero of modern romance, felt that she had drifted at last into quiet waters.

"You perfec'ly know," Margie lifted a pair of reproachful eyes to her sisters, "that Constance Evelyn is the oldest and it's proper she should be the one s'lected."

"What a stickler for proprieties Margie is going to be some day," Joan said.

"What's 'stickler for proprieties'?" Margie promptly inquired.

"Never mind that now," Theo told her; "you find Bob, and tell him to come get cleaned up. Tony'll have Molly 'round directly."

"Are we-all going driving?" Margie asked.

"Hardly," Theo objected. "We're going to try and push Molly about a bit. There are some errands to do, and a few good-byes to say, and you and Bob are going to tell Miss Hallie how sorry you are to go away and leave her."

"But we-all ain't sorry!" Margie declared. "Bob, he says Miss Hallie means all right, but she ain't his idea of a school-teacher. He says he ain't got anything 'gainst her pers'nally, only he thinks she's 'clined to be fussy."

"The Hon. Robert's experience of school-teachers is likely to be enlarged next fall," Jack said. "The day may come when he will sigh for Miss Hallie and her gentle persuasions."

"Don't forget the oiled paper," Joan warned, as a little later Tony brought the carryall round to the front door, "or the Japanese napkins," she added, as the rest started.

"We-all won't," Bob promised. "And I

mean to get some sweet chocolate. It'll come in handy on our journey. Margie's sure to get hungry."

Margie beamed upon him gratefully. "You're the thoughtfulest boy."

"And stop at the post-office to give the change of address," Joan called after them.

"I 'clare, Mis' Joan!" Tony exclaimed, "I brung you-all some mail back dis mornin', an' I clean forgot all about hit, I's be'n so busy." He darted off, returning presently with a letter and a little package, both from Scott.

"The letter's for you, mamma," Joan said, turning to her mother, who was standing in the doorway; "and the package is for me. What do you suppose it can be?"

"You might open it and find out," Mrs. Clayton suggested.

"You read your letter first, please." Joan drew her mother down beside her on the veranda bench. "It doesn't look like a very long one."

Mrs. Clayton opened her letter, glancing over it hastily; then she gave a quick cry of pleasure. "Oh, Joan, such news! Such wonderful news!"

And she read aloud:

“‘DEAR MRS. CLAYTON :

“‘The person who committed the forgery of which my father was unjustly convicted has made full confession, and my father is completely exonerated. He is coming home to us to-day. My mother has gone to meet him.

“‘I cannot write any more now. You will tell them all.

“‘Yours,

“‘SCOTT MONROE.’”

“Oh, mamma !” Joan’s eyes were turned away, to where the sunny road branched off to the one running down to the shore. “I knew,” she said a little under her breath, “that Scott’s father *must* be innocent. How happy they must be now—all of them. But oh, mamma, think of this past year and he was innocent all the time !”

“Yes, dear, that is the awful part, and yet, it would have been so much harder, if he had not been innocent.”

“Suppose that person had not confessed and he had had to go on and on for years.”

“But he has confessed, dear, and now they are all together again.”

Joan drew a deep breath. “What it must mean to Helen and Scott, and they dreaded the going back so. How little they knew !”

"I am thinking most what it means to Mrs. Monroe," Mrs. Clayton said slowly.

"Mamma, can they ever, ever forget the horror of it all—the misery of this last year!"

"She cannot—the younger ones, because they *are* younger, will in time grow away from it—in some degree; but more or less, the shadow of it must always be there—such a shadow, as I pray God, may never come to darken any of your lives."

Joan slipped a hand into her mother's. "Jack will be so glad," she said hurriedly, "and Theo. We have got news for them, haven't we, mamma? Somehow it seems as if in part the joy of it belonged to us, too, doesn't it?"

"And your package?" Mrs. Clayton suggested, breaking the pause that had followed Joan's words, "aren't you forgetting it?"

"No, mamma, only it didn't seem as if one could think about anything else—right away." Joan took up the little carefully-wrapped parcel. "What do you suppose it can be, mamma?" She undid the outer wrappings, disclosing a small square box. "A jeweler's box, mamma!" she exclaimed, taking off the cover with eager fingers.

Inside, in the soft violet cotton, lay the quaintest of watch-charms,—a tiny hand, outstretched as if in welcome, typifying the hand of welcome Joan had extended to Scott on the day of his arrival.

“Oh, mamma!” words quite failed Joan at that moment.

Folded under the cover of the box was a square of paper—a piece of note-paper evidently with the Monroe family motto engraved on it, “*Servabo Fidem.*” On the paper Scott had written: “To remind you of your promise.”

And below,

“Joan, I had ordered this before the good news came. More than ever I want you to have it now. From the bottom of my heart I thank you—shall always thank you. How could I face my father now, if I had chosen otherwise.

“SCOTT.”

